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Compendium of
Research

Ensuring Student Achievement and Teacher Effectiveness Through Proven Research

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**Ensuring Student Achievement and Teacher Effectiveness
Through Proven Research.**

By Lois Bridges, Ph.D.

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Introduction

Libraries should be the beating heart of the school.

~ Stephanie Harvey, *Nonfiction Matters*

Reading shapes lives; reading even saves lives. Consider the stories of our greatest leaders across time, culture, and place. Almost all credit reading as an essential force that catapulted them to success. Thomas Edison, for example, had little formal schooling but was a "relentless autodidact" and profited mightily from reading books in his father's home library as well as the Detroit public library (Walsh, 2010).

But Edison's story has its basis in science; indeed, decades of explicit, systematic cognitive research provide proof beyond dispute that reading not only builds our brains, but also exercises our intelligence.

Reading Makes Us Smart

Anne Cunningham, renowned cognitive psychologist at the University of California, Berkeley, explains that reading is a "very rich, complex, and cognitive act" (2003) that offers an immense opportunity to exercise our intelligence in ways we lose if we don't read. Hundreds of correlational studies demonstrate that the most successful students read the most, while those who struggle read the least. These correlational studies suggest that the more our students read, the better their comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency—and the more likely they are to build a robust knowledge of the world. In short, reading provides us with a cognitive workout that transcends not only our inherent abstract problem-solving abilities but also our levels of education. Reading makes us smart.

Consider these facts:

- Reading builds a cognitive processing infrastructure that then "massively influences" every aspect of our thinking—particularly our "crystalized intelligence" (Stanovich, 2003).

- "Omnivorous reading in childhood and adolescence correlates positively with ultimate adult success" (Simonton, 1988, p. 111).

- Multiple studies have shown that avid readers demonstrate both superior literacy development and wide-ranging knowledge across subjects (Allington, 2011; Hiebert, 2010; Guthrie, 2008; Foorman, 2006; Krashen, 2004).

And beyond the benefits of increased intellectual prowess and an expanded vocabulary, consider the education of the imagination that reading makes possible, as Carol Jago said in her NCTE Presidential address, "…kindling the spirit of creativity in every human heart" (Jago, 2010).

Get a Reading Life

We've known for a long time that the best way to help our students succeed is to encourage them to read. And to that end, we want our students to discover themselves as readers, to have a sense of their own unique, rich, and wondrous reading lives. What books make their hearts race? What topics do they return to again and again? Dick Robinson, President and CEO of Scholastic, sums it up: "You are what you read." Effective teachers work hard to help their students establish a Reading Identity that declares, "This is who I am as a reader and this is why."

This research compendium aims to showcase decades of reliable reading research to support you in your ultimate aim as an educator: to help your students become proficient, avid readers who bring passion, skill, and a critical eye to every reading encounter.

In this way, our students might grow to exemplify and embrace the words of Myra Cohn Livingston, poet, musician, critic, educator, and author:

Libraries and books have more than changed my life—they have made it possible.

Reader's Guide: How the Compendium Is Organized

The Research Compendium is designed to allow you to start anywhere and read in any direction as you follow your own reading interests and needs. You'll note that every section begins with an Opener that includes the following:

- **Quote to Consider**
  Showcases words that are sometimes provocative — and always thoughtful.

- **Reader's Guide**
  Spotlights the section's chapter titles and provides page numbers so you can find what you need, fast.

- **The Big Ideas**
  Selects key data points—or essential research—that you can share in a PowerPoint presentation, district newsletter, or grant application.

What's more, each research chapter follows a template for easy, predictable reading with self-explanatory headers:
  - Introduction
  - What the Research Shows
  - Research Wrap

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How I Use Research in My School District

by Tracy N. Wilson, Literacy Coordinator
Cherry Creek Schools, Colorado

Although data collections dominate most schools seeking program improvement, such collections fail to shift teaching sufficiently to impact student performance. This is true in my district as well as nationally as evidenced by the PIRLS (Progress in Reading Literacy Study) and the NAEP (National Assessment of Education Practice) assessments of reading. Despite two decades of intense focus on data, instruction has not substantively changed.

Research, regardless of the resource, tells us that teaching matters. Richard Allington has been right for decades: texts, task, talk, teaching, and time matter. Yet, we have fixated on data. As the Elementary Literacy Coordinator for the fourth largest district in Colorado, I have elected to use a slightly different model for program improvement: one grounded in research and reflection.

My mission is to expand the vision of our classroom teachers and help them close the gap between what they do every day and what research tells us they should do. I use research to inform instruction and reflection to describe what actually works. For instance, when I work with a grade level team during their planning period, we identify a singular focus, such as nonfiction reading and writing. I provide a buffet of research selections about content literacy for teachers to select, read, and discuss. Then, they cooperatively develop a short description of best practices based on the research and reflect on their current practices to discern some possibilities for moving forward. The gap analysis they conduct is about teaching. Every time we meet, I ask each teacher to commit to try something new based on research and to reflect on its impact on students' learning. The research-driven process is collaborative problem solving at its best.

Using research in this way also embeds the 21st century literacy skills we seek to promote. Teachers analyze a variety of compelling, complex texts, they collaborate to identify their own

problems and possible solutions, they create new models of teaching (including the employ-
ment of new media and texts), and they analyze the effectiveness of their new practices. The
process is personalized and precise; it is self-driven professional learning.

The results are profound. Research allows me to engage teachers in conversations about
teaching and learning. We do analyze data but only in small chunks; we continually ask:
Are we growing advanced speakers, readers, thinkers, and writers? If not, we go back to the
research and reflect on our practice…what we do every day. My objective is to arm teachers
with the intellectual resources they need to design instruction to best meet their students'
needs. I do not believe there is a lack of teacher will limiting performance growth; instead,
I believe there is a lack of focus on the one thing research tells us matters most—teaching.
Research may be the missing link.

Classroom Libraries: The Heart of Successful Schools

Rather than waiting for students to discover the joys of the library, we must bring the books to the students. Students need to be surrounded by interesting books daily, not just on those occasional days when the teacher takes them to the library.

~ Kelly Gallagher, *Readcide*

Reader's Guide

The Big Ideas About Avid Reading and Classroom Libraries

- Students need enormous quantities of successful reading to become independent, proficient readers (Allington, 2011; 2009; 2006; Worthy & Roser, 2010; Gallagher, 2009; Miller, 2009).

- Allington defines *successful reading* as "reading experiences in which students perform with a high level of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension…. It is the high-accuracy, fluent, and easily comprehended reading that provides the opportunities to integrate complex skills and strategies into an automatic, independent reading process" (2011; 2009).

- *Volume of reading* is critical in the development of reading proficiency (Johnston, 2011); volume is defined as a combination of the time students spend reading plus the numbers of words they actually consume as they read (Allington, 2010; Guthrie, 2004).

- The U.S. Dept. of Education maintains that avid reading is a widely recognized precursor to:
    - o Better skills acquisition
    - o Superior grades
    - o Desirable life related to income, profession, employment, and other attributes (2005).

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Understand Why Classroom Libraries Are Essential

Kids not only need to read a lot but they also need lots of books they can read right at their fingertips. They also need access to books that entice them, attract them to reading. Schools can foster wider reading by creating school and classroom collections that provide a rich and wide array of appropriate books and magazines and by providing time every day for children to actually sit and read.

~ Richard L. Allington, *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers*

How much time should students spend in actual in-school reading? Allington (2006) recommends at least one and a half hours of real reading every day; struggling readers may need 3-5 hours of successful daily reading.

We've long known that quality libraries have a positive impact on student achievement (McGill-Franzen & Botzakis, 2009; Gallagher, 2009; Constantino; 2008; Atwell, 2007; Williams, Wavell, and Coles, 2001; Hamilton-Pennell, et al., 2000). In their article "Productive Sustained Reading in Bilingual Class" (2010), researchers Jo Worthy and Nancy Roser detail the ways in which they flooded a fifth grade classroom in a diverse, high poverty school with books (Elley, 2000; Gallagher, 2009) and spent a year monitoring and documenting the students' involvement with their new expansive classroom library and the opportunities it provided for sustained reading both in school and at home. The results are impressive: before the book flood, only 27% of the students had passed the state achievement test as fourth graders; after the book flood, all but one student passed the test and he missed by just one point (p. 250).

At the International Association of School Librarians Conference held in Auckland, NZ, Ross Todd explored the relationship of libraries to academic achievement (2001). A library's impact is especially noteworthy when it serves as support for students' inquiry projects. Todd notes the outcomes when students are invited to follow a line of inquiry as they develop their control of information literacy (a key requirement across the grades of the Common Core State Standards). He found that students:

- are better able to master content material
- develop more positive attitudes toward learning
- respond more actively to the opportunities in the learning environment
- are more likely to perceive themselves as active, constructive learners

As Todd notes, "the hallmark of a library in the 21st century is . . . the difference [it makes] to student learning . . . it contributes in tangible and significant ways to the development of human understanding, meaning making, and knowledge construction."

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What the Research Shows About Classroom Libraries

Once a year, the staff of *The Daily Beast* creates an annual list of the nation's smartest cities. How do they determine what constitutes a "smart city?" Besides the education level of the city's citizens, they also take into consideration the community's "intellectual environment," as measured by nonfiction book sales and the prevalence of colleges and libraries.

If libraries can raise the intellectual life of an entire city, just think what a classroom library can do for your students! Here are some statistics:

Krashen, Lee, and McQuillan (2010) analyzed the Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS) data to determine whether school libraries can reduce the effect of poverty on reading achievement, and the answer is a resounding *yes*. The results confirm that:

- Variables related to libraries and reading are powerful predictors of reading test scores; indeed, to some extent, access to libraries and books can even overcome the challenges of poverty.

- One possible remedy to the socioeconomic gaps in academic achievement is to make sure that children of low-income families have access to high-quality, age-appropriate books. Having books facilitates children's reading (Lindsay, 2010).

- A common feature of effective reading programs is student access to a wide variety of appealing trade books and other reading materials (Allington, 2011; Cullinan, 2000).

- Highly effective literacy educators create print-rich classroom environments filled with lots of high-quality, diverse reading materials (Gambrell, et al., 2007).

- Access to an abundance of books within the classroom results in increased motivation and increased reading achievement (Kelley, M. & Clausen-Grace, N., 2010; Worthy & Roser, 2010; Guthrie, 2008; Routman, 2003).

- Internationally, most fourth grade students (89%) attended schools with libraries, and had classroom libraries (69%) (Overview of Progress in International Reading Literacy, 2007).

- Students in classrooms with well-designed classroom libraries 1) interact more with books, 2) spend more time reading, 3) demonstrate more positive attitudes toward reading, and 4) exhibit higher levels of reading achievement (National Assessment of Educational Progress Report, 2005).

- Those who have more access to books read better (Krashen, Lee, and McQuillan, 2008).

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- Books are a vital component of a print-rich classroom environment (Wolfersberger, Reutzel, Sudweeks, & Fawson, 2004).

- ". . . wide reading is directly related to accessibility; the more books available and the more time for reading, the more children will read and the better readers they will become" (Huck, Helpler, Hickman, Kiefer, 1997, p. 630).

- Fielding, Wilson and Anderson (1988) concluded that children's reading achievement, comprehension, and attitude toward reading improve when their classrooms are filled with trade books and their teachers encourage free reading.

- Large classroom and school libraries that provide ample collections of instructional-level texts play a key role in literacy learning (Worthy & Roser; 2011; Gallagher, 2009; Miller, 2009; Atwell, 2007; Mosenthal, Lipson, Sortino, Russ, & Mekkelsen, 2001).

> One way we show children that we love them is by looking after them as readers. Only when we invite them to find books that delight them is it likely that they will come to cherish literature and their own literacy" (Atwell, 2007, p. 35).

Research Wrap on Classroom Libraries

In sum, if our students are to embrace their reading lives, they need easy access to an abundance of books across a wide range of genre and topics. Veteran teacher Kelly Gallagher explains:

> *Placing students in a daily book flood zone produces much more reading than occasionally taking them to the library. There is something powerful about surrounding kids with interesting books. I have 2,000 books in my room, and because of this, my students do a lot more reading. Establishing a book flood is probably the single most important thing I have done in my teaching career* (Gallagher, 2009, pp. 52–53).

Trade books open up a world of ideas and introduce students to new ways of thinking. As author Marion Dane Bauer (1991, p. 114) explains, bringing children's literature into the classroom is like bringing "another pair of eyes for students to look at the world and at themselves." And, as Dick Robinson reminds us, as part of the campaign to help our students create their own reading identities and reading lives, they should "read every day" and, in this way, "have a better life."

Read to Achieve: Open Books Wide to Lifelong Success

Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.
~ Sir Richard Steele, *The Tattler*

When it comes to the role of books and reading in increasing reading achievement, the facts are indisputable. Extensive and intensive reading (Harwayne, 2001) supports not only high scores on reading achievement tests but also a fulfilling and productive life. "For the majority of young people, enthusiastic and habitual reading is the single most predictive personal habit for the ability to achieve desirable life outcomes" (Bayless, 2010, p. 12). Effective and enthusiastic reading does, as Dick Robinson maintains, create a "better life." The U.S. Department of Education maintains that avid reading is a widely recognized precursor to the following:

- better skills acquisition
- superior grades
- a desirable life, as measured by income, profession, employment, and other attributes

And Donalyn Miller, sixth grade teacher in Keller, Texas, author of the best seller, *The Book Whisperer*, and *Teacher Magazine* blog of the same name, supports a 2,000-plus title library in her own classroom. She makes sure her students enjoy daily in-class reading of self-selected books for 20–30 minutes. Why? Because, as she explains, "We teachers have more than enough anecdotal evidence that the students who read the most are the best spellers, writers, and thinkers. No exercise gives more instructional bang for the buck than reading" (2009; p. 55).

What is *wide reading*? Marzano (2004) defines it as reading that is particularly important in building the academic background knowledge that is a prerequisite for learning within the various content disciplines. In other words, with teacher help, students zero in on a topic of interest, and guided by their own questions, read everything they can find—across genre—that relates to their topic. In this way, they can become quite knowledgeable about a particular topic even without the experience of their own direct personal connections to the topic.

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Proficient Readers Read

Wide daily reading is the most reliable path to the development of proficient readers; indeed, there's no other way to become a proficient reader. No matter what we're trying to get proficient at (cooking, gardening, yoga), we have to practice many, many hours—Malcolm Gladwell (2009) maintains that 10,000 hours is the magic number for optimal success. No surprise, then, that students who read voluntarily and extensively become proficient readers. Indeed, research demonstrates a strong correlation between high reading achievement and hours logged inside a book—or *volume of reading*. Effective reading programs include independent reading of a wide variety of reading materials, including trade books across genres.

How important are time and engagement with books? The difference they make is nothing short of miraculous—engaged readers spend 500% more time reading than do their peers who aren't yet hooked on books—and all those extra hours inside books they love gives them a leg up in everything that leads to a happy, productive life: deep conceptual understanding of a wide range of topics, expanded vocabulary, strategic reading ability, critical literacy skills, and engagement with the world that's more likely to make them dynamic citizens drawn into full civic participation. As Mary Leonhart, author of *99 Ways to Get Kids to Love Reading* (1997), notes:

> *The sophisticated skills demanded by high-level academic or professional work—the ability to understand multiple plots or complex issues, a sensitivity to tone, the expertise to know immediately what is crucial to a text and what can be skimmed—can be acquired only through years of avid reading* (p. 11).

In a classic 1988 study, "Time Spent Reading and Reading Growth," Taylor, Frye, and Maruyama found the amount of time children spend reading is significantly related to their gains in reading achievement. They asked 195 fifth- and sixth-grade children to keep daily logs of their reading at home and at school over a four-month period. They found that the amount of time spent reading during reading period in school contributed significantly to gains in students' reading achievement as measured by reading comprehension scores on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, while time spent reading at home approached significance. There is no doubt that providing students with time to read at school enhances their reading ability.

While the best predictor of reading success is the amount of time spent reading, reading achievement is also influenced by the frequency, amount, and diversity of reading. Avid readers are well acquainted with the joys of a good novel, but they also enjoy reading for a variety of purposes—exploring informational text, absorbing information to perform a task, or sharing poetic text through a range of social media.

Sixth grade teacher Donalyn Miller requires her students to read forty books a year; many of

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Nagy & Anderson (1984) estimated that some middle-grade students read as few as 100,000 words per year, the average student read about 1,000,000 per year, and avid middle grade readers consumed more than 10,000,000 words per year—which accounted for the noteworthy differences in their achievement. The avid readers were far better readers, writers, and spellers—and had better control of grammar—than their peers who didn't read as much.

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them read more than the required forty, and her classroom, bursting at the seams with her wrap-around-the-classroom-and-out-the-door library (Donalyn stores her overflow books in a storage closet across the hall from her classroom), fosters both avid reading and outstanding test scores. In *The Book Whisperer* (2009), which chronicles her dedication to classroom libraries, student reading choice, and independent reading, Donalyn describes how, in one of her speaking engagements, she was asked by a skeptical audience member how she can justify to her principal the hours of class time she dedicates to students' reading. Her answer was simple: she showed her students' outstanding test scores. But she also explains: "Pointing to my students' test scores garnered gasps from around the room, but focusing on test scores or the numbers of books my students read does not tell the whole story. …You see, my students are not just strong, capable readers; they love books and reading" (p. 4).

What the Research Shows About Wide Reading

See what's possible when students love reading and feast on books:

- It is during successful, independent reading practice that students consolidate their reading skills and strategies and come to own them. Without extensive reading practice, reading proficiency lags (Allington, 2009).

- Students who read widely and frequently are higher achievers than students who read rarely and narrowly (Guthrie 2008; Atwell, 2007).

- Increased frequency, amount, and diversity of reading activity increases background knowledge and reading achievement (Worthy & Roser, 2010; Guthrie et al., 2008).

- The volume of independent silent reading students do in school is significantly related to gains in reading achievement (Swan, Coddington, Guthrie, 2010; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003).

- Adolescent and young adults' engagement in reading, including the amount of time they spend on reading and the diversity of materials they read, is closely associated with test performance and reading ability (Krisch et al., 2002).

- Fourth graders in the United States do better academically when they…have greater access to books and other reading materials in their environment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

- Reading volume…significantly affects…general knowledge of the world, overall verbal ability, and academic achievement (Shefelbine, 2000).

- The amount of reading that children do influences their achievement, as long as the children are guided and monitored during that reading…and they read books at an appropriate level of difficulty (Stahl, 2004).

Research Wrap on Wide Reading

Robert Marzano (2004) regards "wide reading" as a key strategy for building academic background knowledge—particularly important for students who may have had limited experience with the world beyond their own homes and neighborhoods. Wide, extensive reading offers opportunities to transcend the limitations of narrow experience, but it shouldn't be left to chance. Marzano suggests that the most effective wide reading programs are carefully scaffolded, making optimum use of reading resources, time, and teacher monitoring. To this end, he recommends eight key principles that characterize successful programs (p. 42):

- **Access** means that a wealth of reading materials is readily available to students, in classroom libraries, the library media center, and other school sources. Successful programs connect materials to students rather than rely on students to locate them on their own time.

- **Appeal** means that students are encouraged to read materials that are of high personal interest and are at an appropriate level of difficulty.

- **Conducive Environment** means creating a positive and comfortable space free of noise and interruptions for students to become immersed into their reading.

- **Encouragement** means not only showing enthusiasm for conversing with students about their reading, but also demonstrating excitement for one's own personal reading.

- **Professional Development** means providing teachers with the rationale and support for their essential role in fostering wide reading among their students.

- **Intrinsic Motivation** means that students are reading to satisfy personal interests and answer their own questions about the world.

- **Follow-up activities** are particularly important to deepen the wide reading experience. Students may be asked to interact with the material they are reading ("what is one thing you read today that you found especially interesting") or interact with their peers about their reading. Follow-up activities are designed to further comprehension and spark conversation.

- **Distributed time to read** refers to the frequency with which "wide reading" time is allocated within a school week.

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Build a Reading Life— and Comprehension, Vocabulary, and Fluency

The sophisticated skills demanded by high-level academic or professional work—the ability to understand multiple plots or complex issues, a sensitivity to tone, the expertise to know immediately what is crucial to a text and what can be skimmed—can be acquired only through years of avid reading.

~ Mary Leonhardt, *99 Ways to Get Kids to Love Reading*

Liz Murray's riveting *Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival, and My Journey from Homeless to Harvard* (2009) details her struggles from hard scrabble life on the streets to a life of the mind at Harvard. How did she do it? Books and libraries played a pivotal role. While most kids don't experience a rise from poverty as dramatic as Murray's, nevertheless, kids who may find themselves without enough to eat find intellectual sustenance at their local library. Books are astonishing gifts for the mind and, as such, it's not surprising to discover the link between a youthful lust for books and adult success.

Let's recall what books and independent reading do:

Independent Reading Promotes Reading Achievement

The research demonstrates that word recognition, fluency, and reading comprehension are inextricably linked (Hiebert, E. & Reutzel, R. 2010; Allington, 2009; Gambrell, Morrow, Pressley, 2007; Berninger, Abbott, Vermeulen & Fulton, 2006; Krashen, 2004; Catts, Hogan, & Fey, 2003), although for older middle school students, semantic skills figure prominently in reading comprehension (Vellutino, et al., 2007). A multitude of research studies across decades reveals the unequivocal correlation between the reading of meaningful, connected text and improved reading achievement (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkerson, 1985; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Ingham, 1981; Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990).

In l988, in "one of the most extensive studies of independent reading yet conducted,"

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Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) traced reading growth to an array of activities related to independent reading. And no surprise: "They found that the amount of time students spent in independent reading was the best predictor of reading achievement and also the best predictor of the amount of gain in reading achievement made by students between second and fifth grade."

The benefits of independent reading are many. Again and again, research demonstrates that reading:
- fosters fluency
- increases vocabulary
- builds background knowledge

Let's explore each one in turn:

Fostering Fluency

While it seems commonsense that increased reading activity leads to improved fluency, in this case, common sense is substantiated by research:

> Reading fluently is not merely reading fast or turning the pages quickly. Reading fluently involves reading accurately, efficiently, and with comprehension; in other words, reading with appropriate speed so that what is being read actually makes sense (Goldenberg, 2011).

- Tim Rasinski, widely recognized as a leading authority on reading fluency, suggests that fluency is the "gateway to comprehension." As he points out, "It may not be comprehension itself, but readers have to have some degree of fluency to comprehend what they read" (Rasinski, 2010, p. 33).

- Quick ratings of third-, fifth-, and eighth-grade students' oral reading correlated significantly with their overall reading proficiency on standardized silent-reading comprehension tests (Rasinski, 2010).

- Unless children read substantial amounts of print, their reading will remain laborious, lacking fluency, and limited in effectiveness (Allington, 2009).

- Daniel Willingham (2007) suggests that it makes sense to teach students comprehension strategies but cautions that in order to be effective, "students must have achieved some level of fluency" (p. 45).

- Reading scholars Nell Duke, Michael Pressley, and Katherine Hilden (2004) suggest that reading comprehension challenges may stem from difficulties with fluency.

- Fluency develops as a result of many opportunities to practice reading with a high degree of success (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001).

- Independent reading is a major source of reading fluency (Allington, 2006).

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Students who relish and read trade books are typically fluent readers. Effective teachers of reading know that fluency develops from an abundance of reading practice with books readers can read with success. It's a simple formula: students read many books at their independent reading level = students become more fluent at reading = students gain competence and confidence as readers.

Effective teachers of reading understand that when reading to develop fluency, students need to read books that are neither too hard nor too easy for them. Text that is too hard impedes comprehension, and text that is too easy does not promote vocabulary growth. Effective teachers know the reading levels of their students and the reading levels of the trade books in their classroom, so that they can match their students to texts that can be read with success. Matching students to text helps establish an optimal classroom learning environment for reading.

> The average silent reading rate for a second grader is 100 words per minute; 200 words per minute is average for a fifth grader (Allington, 2006).

Increasing Vocabulary

Vocabulary growth is heavily influenced by the amount and variety of material children read (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). And, conversely, reading comprehension is impacted by the depth and breadth of the reader's vocabulary (Tannenbaum, Torgeson, and Wagner, 2006).

- Children expand their vocabularies by reading extensively on their own. The more children read, the more their vocabularies grow (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001; Kuhn, et. al, 2006; Allington, 2006; 2009; Baumann, 2009).

- Children learn an average of 4,000 to 12,000 new words each year as a result of book reading (Anderson & Nagy, 1992).

- Vocabulary, in particular, is very highly correlated with reading comprehension in the upper elementary years (Baumann, 2009; Wagner, Muse, & Tannenbaum, 2007).

- Those who read more have extensive vocabularies—plus they spell better, have more grammatical competence, and they write better (Cho, Park & Krashen, 2008; Lee, Krashen, & Gibbrons, 1999; Polak & Krashen, 1988).

According to the research, the majority of vocabulary growth occurs not as a result of direct instruction, but as the result of reading voluminously (Krashen, 2009). Effective teachers of reading know that for students to own a word, they need to see the word used in meaningful contexts a multitude of times. By reading voluminously, students are frequently exposed to words in meaningful contexts, thus increasing their opportunities to learn new words. Even a moderate amount of daily independent reading of trade books has a positive impact on vocabulary growth. Students at all levels who read independently acquire new words as the result of reading more.

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Building Background Knowledge

Independent reading builds background knowledge. Another extremely well-established research finding that has been evident for decades is that students' reading ability is dramatically influenced by the amount of interrelated information (schema) they have about the topic about which they are reading (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Ausubel & Robinson, 1969; Bartlett, 1932). By reading widely, students are exposed to diverse topics and information, which they can then use in future reading.

- Students who read actively and frequently improve their comprehension of text as a consequence (Duke & Carlisle, 2011; Allington, 2009; Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992).

- The amount of reading is a strong predictor of reading comprehension, outweighing intelligence, economic background, and gender (Reutzel & Gikkubgsworth, 1991).

- An abundance of interesting books in the classroom promotes the use of comprehension strategies (Guthrie et al., 2008).

- Students who are exposed to real texts—books and stories rather than short passages in basal readers—and who respond to what they read perform better on standardized tests of reading achievement (Wenglinsky, 2003).

- Extensive reading of developmentally appropriate material of many kinds, both in and out of school, results in substantial growth in vocabulary and comprehension abilities and in the information base that students acquire (Squires, 2004).

- Reading a lot serves to develop vocabulary, background knowledge, familiarity with complex syntactic structures, and word recognition (Duke & Carlisle, 2011; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997).

Effective teachers of reading know that comprehension is enhanced by reflection and social interaction. Consequently, they provide their students with multiple opportunities to respond to their reading and interact with their peers through a variety of activities such as book clubs and discussions. Student interaction in discussions promotes their ability to think critically and develop a deeper understanding of what they have read.

> Automatic word recognition, acquired primarily through wide reading, is necessary for successful reading comprehension (Cunningham, Nathan & Raher, 2011). Vocabulary, in particular, is very highly correlated with reading comprehension in the upper elementary years (Duke & Carlisle, 2011).

Research Wrap on Comprehension, Vocabulary, and Fluency

Unlike Liz Murray, education reformer and promoter Geoffrey Canada grew up in a stable household. But like Murray, reading and books played a pivotal role in his academic success and ultimate professional accomplishment. In *Fist, Stick, Gun, Knife* (1995), Canada informs us

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that outside of school, voluntary reading contributed substantially to his school success: "I loved reading, and my mother, who read voraciously too, allowed me to have her novels after she finished them. My strong reading background allowed me to have an easier time of it in most of my classes" (p. 70).

Fortunately for her students, sixth grade teacher and bestselling author Donalyn Miller promotes free, voluntary reading *inside* her classroom. By year's end, her students read for 30 minutes of her 90-minute language arts/social study block. And all that reading pays off: "We teachers have more than enough anecdotal evidence that the students who read the most are the best spellers, writers, and thinkers. No exercise gives more instructional bang for the buck than reading" (p.55).

And as reported in R*evisiting Silent Reading: New Directions for Teachers and Researchers* by Elfrieda Hiebert and D. Ray Reutzel (2010), the evidence is compelling that the *Opportunity to Read* (OTR) as coined by Guthrie, Schafter, and Huang (2001) is associated with literacy performance.

> *Foorman et al. (2006), for example, used hierarchical linear modeling to examine the relationship between various instructional practices and impact on reading achievement for 1,285 first graders. Time allocated to reading was the only variable that significantly explained gains on any of the posttest measures, including word reading, decoding, and passage comprehension. Other time factors, such as time spent on word, alphabetic instruction, and phonemic awareness instruction, did not independently contribute to growth in reading achievemen*t (p.198).

Truly, books and avid reading are gifts that keep on giving as, more often than not, they are linked to lifelong success.

Students from low-income homes made expected gains in reading comprehension when they were placed, for two consecutive years, in classrooms that were rated high in exemplary instruction, a nurturing emotional environment, and a print-rich literacy environment (Snow, Porche, Tabors & Harris, 2007).

The Engaged Reader: The Role of Motivation and Text

Reading engagement is more important than students' family background consisting of parents' education and income. Reading engagement connects to achievement more strongly than to home environment.

~ John Guthrie, *Engaging Adolescents in Reading*

Reader's Guide

The Big Ideas About Engaged Readers

- Reading engagement and reading achievement interact in a spiral. Higher achievers read more and the more engaged these students become, the higher they achieve. Likewise, lower achievers read less, and the less engaged decline in achievement. The spiral goes downward as well as upward. In fact, continued low engagement is a precursor to dropping out of school (Guthrie, 2008).

- Diverse learners need a range of multi-sourced text (Worthy & Roser, 2010; Richard Allington, 2002). Students should read extensively across a wide range of text; by twelfth grade, 70% of their reading across the day should be informational (Common Core State Standards, 2010).

- Student choice is pivotal in assuring reading engagement; when our students have a say in determining which books they read, they are more likely to get hooked, stay engaged, and embrace reading.

- Students, especially boys, may prefer informational text; 96% of our online sites comprise nonfiction reading.

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Informational Text: Essential Reading for the 21st Century

Our 21st century students need to acquire the skills to appropriately access, evaluate, use, manage, and add to the wealth of information and media they now have at their thumbs and fingertips.

~ Bernie Trilling & Charles Fadel,
21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times

To function independently in the United States today, adults need not only basic instruction in reading and writing skills that are typically taught in school but also experience with a wide variety of types of texts read for different purposes (Duke & Carlisle, 2011, p. 215).

We've got text—in abundance—and much of it is informational in nature. As UC Berkeley researchers Peter Lyman and Hal Varian, observe: "It is clear that we are all drowning in a sea of information. The challenge is to learn to swim in that sea, rather than drown in it. Better understanding and better tools are desperately needed if we are to take full advantage of the ever-increasing supply of information … (2000, p.1).

The Common Core State Standards aim to help educators do just that; CCSS recommends that in elementary school, half of the text students read across the day should be informational; by Grade 12, that percentage increases to 70%—a reflection of what will be expected of them in college and the workplace. Consider these statistics:

- Increasingly, the reading both adults and students do entails processing highly visual digital texts nonlinearly and selectively (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009).

- 96% of websites contain informational nonfiction text (Trilling, B. & Fadel, C., 2009).

- Most of the reading and writing we do as adults is nonfiction (Duke, 2011; Pinnell & Fountas, 2011; Venezky, 1982).

- Academic achievement in a range of school subjects and academic fields relies heavily on informational reading and writing (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

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- Informational literacy is so inextricably linked to success in American higher education, citizenship, and work that our current era is widely known as the *Knowledge Age* (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 15).

- Information is exploding exponentially. According to the International Data Corporation (IDC; Gantz, 2008), by 2011 the digital universe will be ten times the size it was in 2006, and the amount of new technical information is doubling every 72 hours (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Informational Text: What Is It and How Does it Work?

While informational or factual text fits within the broader category of nonfiction, its primary purpose is to *convey information*. Nell Duke, a researcher who studies children's developing informational literacy, defines informational text as "text written with the primary purpose of conveying information about the natural and social world (typically from someone presumed to be more knowledgeable on the subject to someone presumed to be less so) and having particular text features to accomplish this purpose" (2003).

Additionally, info text is often *discontinuous* in nature; that is, unlike sentences and paragraphs inside a narrative text, it may stand alone—not as part of a rich semantic network of connected sentences. And this discontinuity may well alter the ways in which comprehension unfolds. Linguists Bestgen and Vonk explain: "Understanding a text is generally seen as an incremental process in which new sentences are integrated with the preceding sentences to construct a coherent mental representation of the text content" (1999).

A sign or one-word caption, for example, is discontinuous text and, at some point, children who are learning to read must figure out how this text operates differently from the connected narrative they typically encounter in picture books. Often discontinuous text is embedded in a visual display, which may feature an array of graphics with varying colors, fonts, and illustrations, all of which provide the reader with meaning. Other examples of informational text include:

- Maps
- Schedules
- Menus
- Brochures
- Web pages
- Guidebooks

- Directions
- Newspaper and magazine articles
- Games and directions
- Fact books (e.g., almanacs, field guides)

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Informational text also differs in other important ways from fictional or poetic text. As Fountas & Pinnell (2006) explain, factual texts:

- are organized into sections or categories, rather than the narrative structure of fiction, indicated by headings and subheadings

- may focus on particular people, topics, or places, but do not typically feature characters or settings

- present, as needed, an index, table of contents, glossaries, and bibliographies

- include graphics such as maps, charts, and diagrams that add meaning

- illuminate text with realistic illustrations, photographs, and captions

- feature specialized fonts such as boldface and italics

- provide information to readers through a range of organizational patterns such as description, enumeration, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, chronological sequence, problem/solution, and question/answer — all of which help the reader search, find, and understand specific information

- showcase factual text that's accurate or scientifically true; readers of informational text enter with the belief that what they are reading accurately represents the facts

- may feature specialized content-rich, technical vocabulary related to the topic (p. 146).

Duke and Bennett-Armistead (2003) note that "genre theorists believe that differences among texts develop based on the purposes for those texts" (Halliday & Hasan, 1991; Miller, 1984). As the authors note, "a text written for the purpose of advertising a new car, for example, is fundamentally different from a text written for the purpose of explaining how that car works, which is in turn fundamentally different from a text that chronicles someone's adventures driving that car across the country" (p. 19). These texts serve different purposes, are written for different situations, and feature different characteristics.

Surviving the Information Age: Why We Need More Informational Text in Our Classrooms

There may be no better, more efficient way to build world knowledge and an extensive vocabulary than processing lots and lots of informational text. Since informational text is written to convey key facts about the natural and social world and often contains a highly specialized vocabulary, it provides a jump start to building both a robust vocabulary and wide-ranging conceptual knowledge for even very young children. And the benefits of immersion in informational texts extend to writing development as well. In one study, kindergarten students who simply listened to informational books read aloud incorporated content knowledge, vocabulary, and informational text structures such as diagrams and scientific illustrations in their own writing (Duke & Kays, 1998).

Not surprisingly, many students prefer to read informational text. This may be truer than ever, given its abundance, particularly in a digital format, and may also be especially true for boys. As middle school English/language arts teacher Joelle Brummitt-Yale (2008) notes,

> While boys generally perform lower than girls on reading assessments, there is one area in which they actually "outscore" the girls. Boys' scores on sections of tests featuring informational texts are often higher than those of their female counterparts. This seems to indicate that informational texts are the boys' forte. Teachers and parents should provide boys with informational texts to read and learn from. These can include magazine and newspaper articles, nonfiction books about topics boys are interested in (like hobbies or sports) and instructional manuals.… Offering these texts to boys as instructional tools or for pleasure reading will increase their interest in reading (p. 2).

Even struggling readers may prefer and benefit from informational text in ways not possible with narrative text. Vulnerable readers are often challenged by limited vocabularies, which makes processing complex narratives difficult. An infusion of informational text—particularly about topics that stoke students' interest—may be the easiest way to build their conceptual knowledge and vocabulary base, essential for comprehension in general. What's more, informational text features such as headers, labels, sidebars, and diagrams scaffold readers, enabling them to more easily navigate the text and access the content.

Digital Differences

In general, in this era of e-books, laptops, and hours logged online, it seems recreational reading has changed for teens, but as Kim Patton, president of the Young Adult Library Services Association, notes, "It's not that they're reading less; they're reading in a different way."

This assessment is confirmed by a detailed analysis of "reading for fun"— in books, newspapers and magazines—by researcher Sandra Hofferth of the University of Maryland, who analyzed the detailed daily time-use diaries of a nationally representative sample of young people 12 to 18. Her findings are corroborated by Stanford researcher Michael Kamil, as reported by *Washington Post* reporter Donna St. George (2010):

> Pleasure reading dropped 23 percent in 2008, compared with 2003, from 65 minutes a week to 50 minutes a week—with the greatest falloff for those ages 12 to 14. Still, Hofferth says: "They could be reading on the cell phone, in games, on the Web, on the computer. It doesn't mean they're not reading, but they're not reading using the printed page." Michael Kamil, an education researcher at Stanford, sees it much the same way, noting that teens "still read quite a bit but in different ways and for different reasons than the adults believe they should." The question of what really constitutes "reading" has been debated for decades, says Kamil, whose own definition is broad: It includes not just books, magazines, newspapers and blogs but text messages, multimedia documents, certain computer games, and many Web pages. "It's all important," he said.

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Research Wrap on Informational Reading

Ultimately, as the complexity and range of text available in the world increases, so, too, should our classroom textual offerings. In other words, text diversity is a must—and not only because a wide range of text types reflect real-world offerings, but also because text diversity offers literary and cognitive benefits and helps make our students more successful, nimble readers who can process and evaluate the importance, credibility, and relevance of multiple texts. Guthrie and Wigfield (1997) maintain that "frequency, amount, and diversity of reading activity increase reading achievement" (p. 5). In today's digital world that means not just multi-genre, multi-format text such as books, diaries, and letters, but also multimedia and all matter of digital text, including blogs, Nings, smart phone texts, QR (Quick Response) codes, and "mashups"— a digital media file containing text, graphics, audio, video, or animation drawn from exisitng sources to create a new derivative work.

Whatever the form or format of text, we can be sure that our students will survive and thrive to the extent they are literate and adept at navigating the constellations of informational text—everyday literacy that's not so "everyday" at all, but full of potential and promise for new ways of thinking and learning about our world. As language educator Margaret Mooney (2003) writes, "Our challenge is to ensure our students' lifelong travels in reading and writing open new vistas, extend their understandings, and widen their experiences as they explore their world and the worlds of others" (p. 17).

Boys and Books:
The Gender Gap

The data from our study of boys and reading in fact, challenge us to rethink our answers to the most fundamental questions we ask as teachers: Why do we teach? What do we teach? How do we teach?

> ~ Michael W. Smith and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm,
> *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*

When it comes to reading, girls seem to have the jump on boys. According to a 2010 study by the Center on Education Policy, boys are lagging behind girls on standardized reading tests in all fifty states and, in some states, boys are trailing girls by as much as 10 percentage points.

In Virginia and New Hampshire, for example, middle school girls did better than boys in reading proficiency by 15 percentage points. In New York, girls were 13 percentage points ahead. Jack Jennings, the president of the Center on Education Policy, notes: "In the past, girls did better in the first couple years of school," Jennings said. "But then boys caught up. The difference now is we're finding that boys are not catching up."

Jeff Wilhelm and Michael Smith found much the same. In their widely cited 2002 book, *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*, in which they investigated the literacy lives of boys both inside and outside of school, the authors list out the findings from gender and literacy research as well as their own observations:

- Boys take longer to learn to read than girls do.

- Boys read less than girls read.

- Boys generally provide lower estimations of their reading abilities than girls do.

- Boys value reading as an activity less than girls do.

- Boys have much less interest in leisure reading and are far more likely to read for utilitarian purposes than girls are.

> Currently, up to 60 percent of the students at an average co-educational college or university are female. The majority of bachelors' degrees are now awarded to females in every racial and ethnic group. By 2017, the ratio of female to male college graduates will be 1 1/2 to 1. One demographer calls that prediction "staggering and transformational" (Lamm, 2010).

- Significantly more boys than girls declare themselves "nonreaders."

- Boys spend less time reading and express less enthusiasm for reading than girls do.

- Boys increasingly consider themselves to be "nonreaders'" as they get older; very few designate themselves as such early in their schooling, but nearly 50 percent make that designation by high school.

- Boys and girls express interest in reading different things.

- Boys are less likely to talk about or overtly respond to their reading than girls are.

- Boys prefer active responses to reading in which they physically act out responses, do or make something (Smith and Wilhelm, 2002, pp. 1-12).

Of course, like most things in life, the reason for the reading achievement gap between boys and girls is multi-faceted. In *Teenage Boys and High School English,* Bruce Pirie (2002) reminds readers of biological differences such as the tendency of boys to develop language skills more slowly than girls. Additionally, it's possible that evolutionary brain development figures into the gender differences. Historically, women served as caregivers, men as hunters, which suggests, perhaps, that women enjoy greater facility with self-expression and character appreciation, which in turn boosts their reading comprehension and analysis. And socially, school reading is typically shaped by female teachers and librarians. For some students, reading may be regarded as a "feminine, passive activity" with boys favoring more rugged and active past times such as sports or other outdoor activities. Also, boys may not feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings about the books they read. No question it's complicated and, in fact, Pirie cautions that the challenge is best viewed as a gender continuum: "We must be prepared for the likelihood that strategies intended to help boys will also benefit many girls" (2002, p. 19).

What the Research Shows About Boys and Reading

In *Pam Allyn's Best Books for Boys* (Scholastic 2011), the author lists additional troubling statistics:

- The standardized NAEP test, known as the nation's report card, indicates that by the senior year of high school, boys have fallen nearly 20 points behind their female peers in reading (Von Drehle, *Time*, 2007).

- According to an article by Peg Tyre published in *Newsweek* in 2005, 80% of high-school dropouts are boys and less than 45% of students enrolled in college are young men (*Boy Brains, Girl Brains*, Peg Tyre, *Newsweek*, September 19, 2005).

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- A study by the National Endowment for the Arts showed that by 12th grade, boys score an average of 13 points lower than girls on reading proficiency tests (*To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence*, National Endowment for the Arts, November 2007). Fewer boys than girls take the SAT, apply to college, and earn college degrees (Von Drehle, *Time*, 2007).

- 70% of children diagnosed with learning disabilities are male (Tyre, *Newsweek*, 2005).

- In elementary school, boys are also twice as likely to be placed in special education classes as girls (*The Trouble With Boys*, Peg Tyre, *Newsweek*, January 30, 2006).

- Harvard psychologist William Pollack says, "More boys than girls are in special education classes. More boys than girls are prescribed mood-managing drugs. This suggests that today's schools are built for girls, and boys are becoming misfits" (Von Drehle, *Time*, 2007).

- The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher series reported in March 2010 that boys are more likely than girls to do just enough work to get by in school, and boys are less likely than girls to be confident that they will achieve their goals for the future. Some boys are becoming completely disconnected from the classroom experience. One theory is that the increased emphasis on assessment and standardization in educational policy has created classrooms that no longer allow for the unique ways that many boys learn.

- Anthony Rao, a noted behavioral psychologist, points out that boys learn best with hands-on manipulation of objects and visual representations of concepts (Downey, Get Schooled Blog, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 2010).

- By the senior year of high school, boys have fallen nearly 20 points behind their female peers in reading (NAEP scores; Von Drehle, *Time*, 2007).

- 80% of high-school dropouts are boys and less than 45% of students enrolled in college are young men (*Boy Brains, Girl Brains*, Peg Tyre, *Newsweek*, September 19, 2005).

- A study by the National Endowment for the Arts showed that by 12th grade, boys score an average of 13 points lower than girls on reading proficiency tests (*To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence,* National Endowment for the Arts, November 2007).

Allyn notes that our current educational policy has effectively 1) narrowed instruction; and 2) limited options for curriculum innovation. This is all to the detriment of our boys; she explains:

The focus on testing in academic learning has left less time for choice and more demand for conformity. What will help our boys become active learners and self-identified readers is a return to creative innovation and choice in the classroom. Let's pay attention to the way our children learn best— at home, at school, and in the world. Let's embrace unique learning styles and use them to inform our teaching. Let's give our children options that intrigue them and tap into their natural curiosity. Together we can help every child feel empowered in the classroom and engaged learners and readers their whole lives.

Reading Remedy: Text Selection and Pedagogy

We're facing a serious challenge. What can we do to overcome it? Everyone who has explored the problem—including Allyn, Perie, and Wilhelm and Smith—suggests the remedy begins with appropriate text selection and choice. In other words, we need to reconsider the books we're bringing into our classrooms. Too often, it seems, they are books that don't appeal to boys and young men. Author and former national children's literature ambassador Jon Scieszka has created Guys Read, "a literacy program to connect boys with books they will want to read." Drawing from his own experience as a boy who didn't connect with reading as well as input from Guys Read voters, Scieszka recommends books that boys say they like. And the hoped-for end result? "Boys become better readers, better students, better guys."

Wilhelm and Smith also recommend giving boys a say in what they read, balanced however, with teacher-recommended or required texts. In this way, boys are guaranteed a richer reading diet than they might choose for themselves.

Wilhelm notes that the texts boys choose to read on their own are typically those that help them connect with the world. In other words, boys who see the relationship between the texts they read and their current lives are more likely to be engaged and to respond to the text (2002).

Teacher-librarian Michael McQueen runs the Getting Boys to Read website; drawing from his 15 years of experience in education, he lists the top eight reading topics preferred by boys of all ages:

> The acceleration of formal academic learning has hurt boys far more than girls: Boys are far more likely to be held back a grade in fourth grade and then again in ninth grade, an action that promotes a suspension rate for boys that is twice as high as that of girls. This in turn leads to a male dropout rate of 32% compared to 25% for females (Lamm, 2010).

1. **Miscellaneous nonfiction:** Materials that match boys' current interests. Various formats—websites, magazines, books. Examples: Guinness World Records, *Star Wars: The Complete Visual Dictionary, The Way Things Work*, dinosaurs, pirates, survival/outdoors, biographies

2. **Vehicles:** lowriders, hot rods, custom cars, choppers, sport bikes, trucks, sports cars, race cars

3. **Sports:** extreme sports, skateboarding, BMX, X-Games, motocross football, baseball, basketball, ultimate fighting, pro wrestling

4. **Military:** wars, marines, tanks, weapons, branches of service

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5. **Bizarre/Gross:** farts, poop, boogers, *Ripley's Believe It or Not,* Nasty encyclopedia

6. **Humor:** *Stinky Cheese Man*, pranks, jokes*, Encyclopedia of Humor*

7. **Fiction:** humor, horror, action/adventure, sci-fi, sports

8. **Comics:** Marvel, Calvin & Hobbes, The Simpsons, Manga

Wilhelm (2002) also offers a list of the text features that tend to engage boys because they connect to their worlds.

These include:
- length of text
- visual elements
- level of challenge
- edginess
- realism/believability
- immediacy
- appropriate levels of challenge
- humor

He also recommends a range of reading strategies such as think-alouds, front-loading or pre-reading strategies, role-playing, forming living statues or tableaux, and writing and performing vignettes from the book that help boys build a relationship between the texts they read and their current lives.

Research Wrap About Boys and Reading

Whether boys are pursuing so-called gross topics or young adult fantasies such as Harry Potter and the Twilight series that both boys and girls seem to favor, our goal is to raise students who value books and work to actively create their own rich reading lives. Pam Allyn's closing eloquent words remind us of these essential goals:

Boys who read widely and wisely, joyously and purposefully, are the same boys who will someday raise children wisely and well, make interesting work decisions, and step forward into the world with kindness, intention, and boldness.

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Differentiation: Support for Diverse Learners

By 2035, students of color will be a majority in our schools, with increasing populations of children of immigrant and migrant families expanding the presence of cultural diversity in schools. . . teachers must adjust curriculum, materials, and support to ensure that each student has equity of access to high quality learning.

~ Carol Ann Tomlinson and Caroline Edison,
Differentiation in Practice

Literature has always played a pivotal role in helping our students transcend boundaries created by ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences. "Literature helps children develop their cultural identities as it allows them to understand and appreciate the cultures of others." It's often the first step toward "eliminating stereotyping and prejudice and helping students develop cultural identity" (Craft Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008).

A rich classroom collection of multicultural trade books acknowledges the background experience of culturally diverse students, bridges the gap between home and school, and enhances their engagement in reading. As Lehman, Freeman, and Scharer note, "As technology advances and opportunities for global communication expand, the value and importance of international children's books will continue to grow (2009, p. i).

Scholar Dr. Alfred Tatum promotes what he calls *enabling texts,* books that are deeply significant and meaningful to all adolescents, but especially important for our diverse students living in high-poverty urban environments. Enabling texts, at times authored by writers who have overcome adversity themselves, form a textual lineage that speaks to the rich possibilities of a life both thoughtful and well lived. Tatum believes these books offer their readers a road map to life as they strive to develop their own "plan of action" and a "healthy psyche" (Tatum, 2009, p. 65). Indeed, while Tatum draws inspiration from the liberation literacy of the 19th century inspired by Frederick Douglass, his focus on *human development*—not simply reading development—gets at the heart of 21st Century Learning Skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

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Reading as the Best Support for English Language Learners

Linguist Stephen Krashen maintains that free voluntary reading or independent reading is one of the "most powerful tools we have in language education" (2004, p. 1). Research suggests that the acquisition of English as a second language is enhanced by native language use. Thus, effective teachers, to the extent possible, provide English language learners with trade books in both languages.

Researcher Claude Goldenberg of Stanford University agrees that teaching students to read in their first language (L1) promotes higher levels of reading in English; indeed, the research is indisputable. Nearly three dozen experiments and five meta-analyses of the data have been reported since the 1960s; all reached the same conclusion:

> *Teaching students to read in their first language promotes reading achievement in their target language (L2) in comparison to teaching students to read in the L2 exclusively. The meta-analyses also concluded, not surprisingly, that primary language instruction promotes higher levels of literacy in the primary language* (2011, p.691).

It's always important to keep in mind, however, the literacy foundation of each student in question. An English language learner designation applies to students "who vary by age, country of origin, mother tongue, socioeconomic status, degree of access and exposure to formal schooling, and so on. Variations among these factors influence the extent to which instruction practices can favorably impact learning to read in a second language" (Carlo, 2007).

What the Research Shows about Diverse Learners

- Trade books are powerful instructional tools for meeting the needs of a variety of students with diverse learning styles (Worthy & Roser, 2010; Flippo, 2003).

- The same language-rich, language-integrated environment that helps native speakers acquire literacy also helps ESL students add English to their home language (Freeman, 2007; Houk, 2005; Pilgreen & Krashen, 1993).

- Language flourishes best in a language-rich environment. Second language learners need to be exposed to meaningful literacy activities. It is vital for teachers to make reading and writing appealing and significant for the children (Edelsky, Smith, & Faltis, 2009; Freeman & Freeman, 2007).

- In-school free reading programs are effective for vocabulary development, grammar test performance, writing, and oral/aural language ability (Krashen, 2004; 2007).

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- In Elley's 1998 study of free voluntary reading, in all cases, children who were encouraged to read for pleasure outperformed traditionally taught students on standardized tests of reading comprehension and other measures of literacy.

- In an earlier study (1983), Elley and Mangubhai found that reading significantly increased the reading achievement of children. They studied 614 children (380 in the experimental groups and 234 in the control group) in 4th and 5th grade classrooms in rural Fijian schools with very few books. The researchers provided 250 high-interest, illustrated story books in English per classroom to the experimental groups. The control group continued to use the ongoing English language program that put little emphasis on reading. Eight of the 16 experimental classrooms had sustained silent reading (time set aside in class for children to read books of their choice). The other eight experimental classrooms had the Shared Book Experience (also called shared reading, a teaching technique where the teacher points to the print in full view of the children while reading to the children). They found that after eight months, the pupils in the two experimental groups progressed in reading comprehension at twice the rate of the comparison group (p.1).

Research Wrap on Diverse Learners

In sum, English language learners need intensive and comprehensive oral English Language Development (ELD), particularly in academic English—the vocabulary, syntax, genres, and discourse that are essential for more abstract, formal, and demanding academic success. And ELLs also need academic content. Content knowledge is essential for reading comprehension and general academic success (Goldenberg, 2011). Again and again, the research shows that the most efficient and effective way to deliver both is through wide, extensive reading.

 Krashen (2004) summarizes his results:

When children read for pleasure, when they get '"hooked on books," they acquire, involuntarily and without conscious effort, nearly all of the [needed] language skills: They will become adequate readers, acquire a large vocabulary, develop the ability to understand and use complex grammatical constructions, develop a good writing style, and become good (but not necessarily perfect) spellers. Although free voluntary reading alone will not ensure the attainment of the highest levels of literacy, it will at least ensure an acceptable level. It will also provide the competence necessary for dealing with demanding texts" (p. 150).

Exemplary Instruction and Assessment: What Works for All Students

Empirical research has shown that students with autonomy-supportive teachers, compared with students with controlling teachers, experience … more classroom engagement, emotionality, creativity, intrinsic motivation, psychological well-being, conceptual understanding, academic achievement, and persistence in school.

~ Johnmarshall Reeve and Hyungshim Jang,
"What Teachers Say and Do to Support Students' Autonomy
During a Literacy Activity"

Reader's Guide

The Big Ideas About Exemplary Instruction and Assessment

- Students need active teaching—"explicit explanation" and "direct teaching"; in his study of exemplary elementary classroom teachers, Dick Allington found that they routinely demonstrate the strategies they want their students to use and provide cogent explanations of every teaching move they make (Allington, 2002).

- Exemplary classrooms feature lots of problem solving, intentional talk—it isn't *interrogational* (teacher asks question; students compete to respond); rather it is *conversational* and highly personalized. Teachers and students discuss ideas, concepts, hypotheses, strategies, and responses with one another.

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- The school day is built around longer learning experiences; students read whole books, complete collaborative research projects, write extended texts. Teachers invite managed choice (with teacher guidance, students make their own decisions about what to read, write, and study; students are engaged and self-regulated).

- Teachers evaluate improvement (rather than just achievement) and assign grades based on effort and improvement.

- The primary thrust of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) can be summarized in four points (Jago, 2011). The CCSS:

    1. establish higher, clearer, fewer standards.

    2. focus on informational text.

    3. encourage every student to write well and more frequently — in other words, students must create polished writing that often relates to text that they've read.

    4. require cross-disciplinary responsibility for students' literacy

Common Core State Standards and Guided Reading: The Best Way into Complex Text

The standards establish a "staircase" of increasing complexity in what students must be able to read so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school.

~ Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) build on research and international models and draw information and inspiration from numerous sources, including state departments of education, professional organizations, scholars, educators from kindergarten through college, parents, and concerned citizens. As a result, the Standards are:

- research- and evidence-based
- aligned with college and work expectations
- rigorous
- internationally benchmarked

In sum, students are more mobile than ever, traveling across states as they follow their families to new jobs and opportunities in other states; what's more, not all individual state standards are equally thoughtful. Therefore, most believe that, at this point in our nation's history, common state standards for our nation's students make good sense (Jago, 2011).

What Are the Standards?

The Common Core State Standards set language arts requirements for Kindergarten through Grade 12, and for Literacy in History/Social Studies and Science. As students progress through the grades, they are required to read increasingly complex text: "Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year's grade-specific standards and retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades."

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The Common Core State Standards for Reading/Language Arts are organized as shown below:

Standard One: Reading: Literature

Standard Two: Reading: Informational Text

Standard Three: Foundational Skills

Standard Four: Writing

Standard Five: Speaking and Listening

Standard Six: Language

Standard Seven: Range, Quality, and Complexity: Texts Illustrating the Complexity, Quality, and Range of Student Reading

Developing "Literate Capacities"

The Common Core State Standards aim to create students who advance through the grades developing as fully literate young people. The overview of the CCSS (2010) states that a student who has mastered the standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language is able to "exhibit with increasing fullness and regularity" seven capacities of the literate individual or what might also be regarded as seven essential habits of mind. Teachers who adopt the strategic, exemplary instructional practices of Guided Reading, which has always centered on a close reading of text, find it serves as a super highway to creating confident learners who can read critically, ask essential questions, follow a line of inquiry, articulate their own ideas, and, in general, enjoy the life of mind robust literacy makes possible. As teachers draw from the Common Core State Standards—and implement Guided Reading—they help their students develop these literate capacities.

Demonstrate independence

Students are able to comprehend and critique a wide range of text types and genres, pinpoint the key message, request clarification, and ask relevant questions. As they engage in lively, content-rich discussions, their vocabularies grow, as does their control over Standard English and ability to build on others' ideas while articulating their own. Ultimately, students become self-directed learners, obtaining the human support, teachers, peers, authorities, and resources—print, digital, and multimedia—they need to support their own learning.

Build strong content knowledge

Students engage with rich content through wide-ranging quality texts; in the process, they learn to read purposefully, often led by their own essential questions. They hone their general knowledge while they gain content-specific information, all of which they learn to share with others through writing and speaking. Note: Under CCSS, students need to read twice as much, both fiction and nonfiction. The quality of nonfiction (informational texts) is much greater than it was 15 years ago (Jago, 2011).

Percentages of time that must be devoted to informational text:

       Grade 4: 50%

       Grade 8: 55%

       Grade 12: 70%

Note this is *across the day*—*not* just in the English/Language Arts Class.

Respond to varying demands of audience

Students become text- and audience-sensitive, understanding that different texts arrive in different formats and serve different purposes (consider the pragmatics of a recipe versus a poem or the delivery of an advertising jingle versus a persuasive essay). As students are immersed in multiple examples of text types, exploring their form and function, they soon learn to control the various texts themselves, adjusting their purpose for reaching, writing, and speaking in ways that align with the task at hand.

Comprehend as well as critique

In this era of print and multimedia bombardment, teachers recognize that their ultimate aim is to help their students become critical readers, so they not only understand the message but also can question its assumptions, relevance, and soundness. Learning how to be thoughtfully discerning is a key skill in 21st century learning.

Value evidence

Again, with the explosion of new information, students need to learn how to back up what they say and write with evidence. The ability to articulate what they believe and why—citing relevant evidence to make key points—and expecting the same of others is, today, a standard skill and expectation.

Use technology and digital media strategically and capably

Technology offers a universe of learning, but students need guidance in how to conduct efficient, productive online searches and then integrate what they learn into other media. Students also need to have a sense of what technology can and cannot do—what are its limitations? And what technical tool is the best fit for each task?

Come to understand other perspectives and cultures

Reading in general and literature in particular have always offered the promise of transcendence, of an opportunity to experience other lives, universes, and emotional fields. A kaleidoscope of culture, language, human values, opinions, and perspectives flashes into focus through reading, and helps to shape the awareness, sensitivity, and appreciation of a literate person.

How Guided Reading Helps Students Develop the "Literate Capacities" Promoted by the CCSS

Literate capacities begin with understanding. In order to crack open and comprehend a text, our students need to engage in three kinds of thinking:

- Thinking Within the Text
- Thinking About the Text
- Thinking Beyond the Text

These mental acts of processing happen simultaneously and largely unconsciously; indeed, Fountas and Pinnell (2006) explain that our goal as teachers is to "enable readers to assimilate, apply, and coordinate systems of strategic actions without being fully aware that they are doing so" (p. 45). But it is engagement with text within the context of Guided Reading that enables the habits of mind or literate capacities promoted by the CCSS.

To understand more completely how the strategic actions students develop through Guided Reading build the literate capacities the CCSS promote, let's look at the overlap between the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standards—"broad standards" which complement the grade-specific CCSS (p. 10)—and the strategic processing actions Fountas and Pinnell outline in their seminal work, *Comprehending and Fluency: Thinking, Talking, and Writing About Reading* (2006).

Key Ideas and Details	**Thinking Within the Text** • Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. • Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize key supporting details and ideas. • Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and evolve over the course of a text.
Craft and Structure	**Thinking About the Text** • Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. • Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and portions of the text, such as a section, chapter, scene, or stanza relate to each other and the whole. • Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

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Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Thinking Beyond the Text

- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

- Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Research Wrap on CCSS and Guided Reading Instruction

The Common Core State Standards call for reading across a wide range of increasingly complex text. And, in perfect alignment with the CCSS, Guided Reading teachers strive to help students read and comprehend increasingly complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. Meeting the goals of your Guided Reading instruction enables you to address and satisfy the requirements of the Core Standards.

The research that undergirds Guided Reading informs the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as well; matching texts to readers and systematically increasing text complexity, a basic tenet of CCSS, lies at the core of Guided Reading. No surprise then that the description of Guided Reading, provided by Braunger and Lewis (2008), reflects the instructional call to action touted by CCSS:

> *Guided Reading gives students the opportunity to read a wide variety of texts; to problem solve while reading for meaning; to use strategies on complete, extended text; and to attend to words in texts. Guided reading requires that a teacher's selection of text, guidance, demonstration, and explanation be made explicit to the reader (p. 78; cited in Kucer, 2008).*

The new standards give specific goals that, by the end of the 12th grade, should prepare students for college work. Book reports will ask students to analyze, not summarize. Presentations will be graded partly on how persuasively students express their ideas. History papers will require reading from multiple sources; the goal is to get students to see how beliefs and biases can influence the way different people describe the same events (Santos, 2011).

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Books, RTI, and No-Fail Help for Struggling Readers

When classroom teachers provided students with easy access to a wide range of interesting texts, the effects on comprehension and motivation to read were enormous.

~ Richard Allington, *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers*

Response to Intervention (RTI) originated in 2002 with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). While its premise was simple, its results are revolutionary: students who struggle with reading no longer face a battery of diagnostic tests administered by a school psychologist which, in years past, typically led to a special education placement. Now, thanks to the RTI breakthrough, classroom teachers use a series of systematic assessments to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their struggling readers. With that data in hand, they are able to create a thoughtful program of systematic, sensitive support for these students inside the comfort of their own classrooms and core reading programs. In other words, rather than referring struggling readers to the school psychologist and special education, a process which can take months, classroom teachers intervene with targeted small group instruction, typically framed around three tiers that represent a "continuum of supports" (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010, p. 4).

Easy Access to Good Books

Getting the right books into kids' hands is the key that opens the way to strategic intervention strategies that work, phonics, and word skill mastery (Taylor, 2000), and—the ultimate goal— engaged readers (Guthrie, 2008). In *What Really Matters in Response to Intervention* (2009), Dick Allington reports on the striking findings of Guthrie and Humenick (2004): "when classrooms provided students with easy access to a wide range of interesting text, the effects on comprehension and motivation to read were enormous." Easy access to books that students enjoyed reading had a profound impact on both reading comprehension and motivation to read. As Allington notes: "No other features of classroom instruction were as powerful in improving both reading comprehension and motivation."

Guthrie explains in no uncertain terms what's needed to help older struggling readers:

In the end, if we truly want struggling readers to improve their reading skills, schools and teachers must take drastic measures. School districts must begin to put money into texts. By allocating funds for high-interest books and by adjusting curricula to allow for the teaching

of such novels, they can take the first step in this important process. Individual teachers must recognize that it is more beneficial to have every student in a class reading a book— despite its content and reading level—than it is to teach Shakespeare's Julius Caesar *to half of a class while the other half becomes more certain that reading is not for them (p.74).*

What the Research Shows About RTI and Struggling Readers

- Children must have easy—literally fingertip—access to books that provide engaging, successful reading experiences throughout the calendar year if we want them to read in volume (Johnston, 2011, p. 363).

- Students, even those who find reading challenging, thrive in classrooms that are filled with books at different levels, where the teacher celebrates books—creating colorful book displays and giving book talks that promote favorite titles—and students are given choice in what they read and time and support to read it (Pressley, et al, 2006).

- Using *appropriately* difficult texts—books that are truly matched to each reader— produced substantive reading growth (O'Connor, et al., 2002).

- McGill-Franzen & Allington (2008) found that fourth grade children of color preferred "kid culture" books about pop stars, comic book characters, and the like. As they note, "one huge goal of any intervention is to dramatically increase the volume of free voluntary reading by struggling readers. Providing books and magazines that are attractive and interesting to the struggling readers may be just the best way to accomplish that goal" (Allington, 2009, p. 158).

- Walczyk & Griffin-Ross (2007) found that struggling readers benefit from some say in what they read and how they read it; in other words, they benefit when they are allowed to choose books they want to read and to slow down their reading and implement compensatory strategies such as reading out loud, back tracking and rereading, pausing, skipping words they don't know, sounding out, analogizing to a known word, or using context to predict what word might come next.

- Ehri, et al. (2007) note that providing lots of opportunities for struggling readers to read texts with high accuracy (99 percent) explained almost all of the success the teachers had in producing accelerated growth. The authors write, "Higher levels [of accuracy]

Intervention all day long means, simply, that struggling readers have books they can read in their hands all day long—and lessons that address their learning needs all day long. This would mean not only reorganizing classroom reading instruction so that it matched struggling readers' needs but also . . . that science and social studies lessons . . . included texts that struggling readers could read accurately, fluently, and with understanding and that address the requisite content (Allington & Baker, 2007, p.85).

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may have been achieved either by the tutors selecting easier texts or by tutors previewing and coaching students more effectively through the texts during previous sessions when the books were introduced" (p. 440).

- Guthrie (2004), commenting on the results of two large national and international sets of data examining the relationship between reading engagement and achievement, writes, "Based on this massive sample, this finding suggests the stunning conclusion that engaged reading can overcome traditional barriers to reading achievement, including gender, parental education, and income" (p. 5).

Research Wrap on RTI and Struggling Readers

In the end, what our challenged readers need above all is immersion in books they love. The only way to learn how to read is to read, widely, deeply, and frequently; hours and hours inside the pages of a wonderful book eventually yield a reader, one who understands in a profound way the pleasures of reading. In this way, reading becomes just as natural and easy as breathing. In school, teachers can help or hinder the possibility this will happen. Here's what the research says about what's needed to support all students as fully engaged readers. The teacher:

- fills the classroom with books at different levels

- introduces new books and displays them in the classroom

- gives students choices in completion of their work

- engages students in authentic reading and writing tasks

- compliments/encourages student effort, behavior, and helpfulness

- promotes higher-order thinking

- makes connections across lessons, subjects, days, and weeks

- does expressive read-alouds

- emphasizes effort in doing best work

- uses small groups for instruction

- models and assists students when presenting new material

- provides many opportunistic mini-lessons

- transitions between lessons smoothly and quickly

- creates a classroom community that is focused, constructive, and encouraging

- doubles reading volume (Allington, 2009, p. 145).

In 1947, Clifton Fadiman introduced the term *home run book*, a book so beloved it hooks its readers forever on the joys of reading. Fadiman observed: "One's first book, kiss, home run, is always the best." Widely acknowledged as the "father of the read aloud," Jim Trelease (2006) notes that the experience of getting lost in a "home run book" may be all that's needed to create a lifelong reader (p. 136).

In a study of home run books, Von Sprecken, Kim, and Krashen (2000) found that a large percentage of elementary school children knew immediately what was meant by that term and also were pleased to report that they had a home run book in their lives. The researchers reported that 53% of the fourth graders they queried and 75% of the sixth graders reported a home run experience (p. 9).

As we work with our students who face reading challenges, let's not forget the importance of helping them find their own home run books.

The Writing Traits: Scaffolding Effective Writing for All

If students are to learn, they must write.

~ National Commission on Writing, *The Neglected "R"*

More than ever, strong, vigorous writing is essential to American productivity and an engaged, intelligent citizenry. No surprise then that *The Writing Framework for the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress* defines writing as "a purposeful act of thinking and expression used to accomplish many different goals" (p. v). Those of us entrusted with fostering new generations of students as capable and confident writers want to make sure that every instructional moment is grounded in sound research. Our goal is nothing less than helping students become skilled, flexible writers who know their way around a persuasive essay, inspired narrative, or expository piece brimming with convincing facts and details. And indeed, the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment will evaluate students' ability to "achieve three purposes common to writing in school and in the workplace (the three *modes* of writing): to persuade, to explain, and to convey experience, real or imagined" (NAEP Writing Framework, 2011).

To this end, we can turn with confidence to more than two decades of convincing research undergirding the Traits Model of Writing, now widely regarded as the gold standard of classroom-based analytic writing assessment and targeted writing instruction. With the Traits Model, teachers and students alike are supported by a continuous teaching-assessing loop.

What the Research Shows: Why the Writing Traits Are So Effective

For more than two decades, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (now known as Education Northwest) and other researchers have studied the effectiveness of the Traits Model and the professional development tools used to train teachers using it. In a nutshell, the traits represent the essential elements of writing inherent in all extended written communication:

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ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and *presentation*. Educators who use the Traits Model center both their instruction and assessment on helping students understand how these elements work together and interact to create a well-written, cohesive piece that accomplishes the writer's goal. Multiple researchers have studied the efficacy of the Traits Model in both large- and small-scale studies:

1. A definitive five-year study of the writing traits is being conducted by Education Northwest, Portland, Oregon, and will be published by the Department of Educa- tion, IES (Institute of Education Science) in 2011. The goal of this study is to provide high-quality evidence on the effectiveness of the analytical trait-based model for increasing student achievement in writing.

2. In a study conducted by Nauman, Stirling, and Borthwick (2011), the researchers examined the alignment between teachers' underlying attitudes and beliefs about good writing and their assessment and teaching of writing. They found that teachers who value conventions more than other aspects of writing put more weight on conventions in their assessment of student work, while teachers who value creativity and risk-taking tend to reward young writers who exhibit those qualities. The researchers concluded that although values varied, schools were consistent in embracing a standardized method or model of instruction, such as the Traits Model.

3. Kozlow and Bellamy (2004) examined the effects of professional development for teachers using the Traits Model and the extent to which the training influenced students' writing skills. The researchers found that after only a short workshop, teachers understood and were able to implement the model. Teachers also reported that their students understood and were able to apply the traits they taught. The researchers did note, however, that a more robust form of professional development than a short workshop would have had a stronger impact on classroom practice.

4. Coe (2000) demonstrated that writing trait assessments are useful to identify stu- dents who might have difficulty on state writing tests and who therefore need extra writing instruction. For example, Coe found that students in Washington state, who had low scores on district- administered Writing Trait assessments were likely to also have low scores on the writing portion of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL).

5. Arter, Spandel, Culham, and Pollard (1994) asked: "Does the writing of students who have direct instruction on assessing writing using the six-trait analytical model improve more than that of students who do not have such instruction?" The researchers discovered that students' scores increased in direct proportion to the amount of instructional and practice time spent on a trait and the order in which
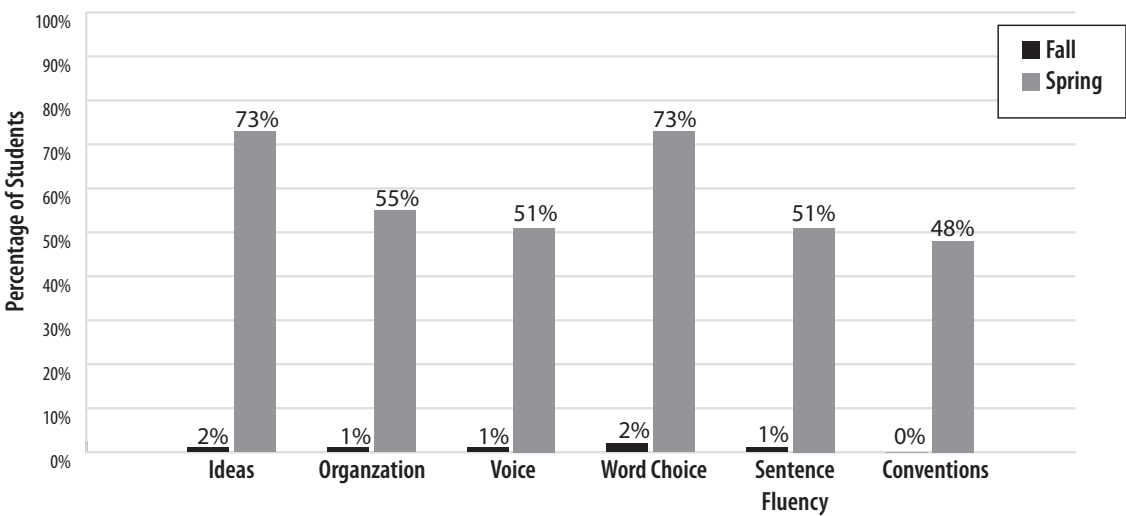
the traits were taught (meaning the earlier a trait was taught, the better students were able to apply it because of the increased amount of time and guidance they received). The study showed that when we focus on the criteria of quality writing—the traits—students show wider overall growth in writing.
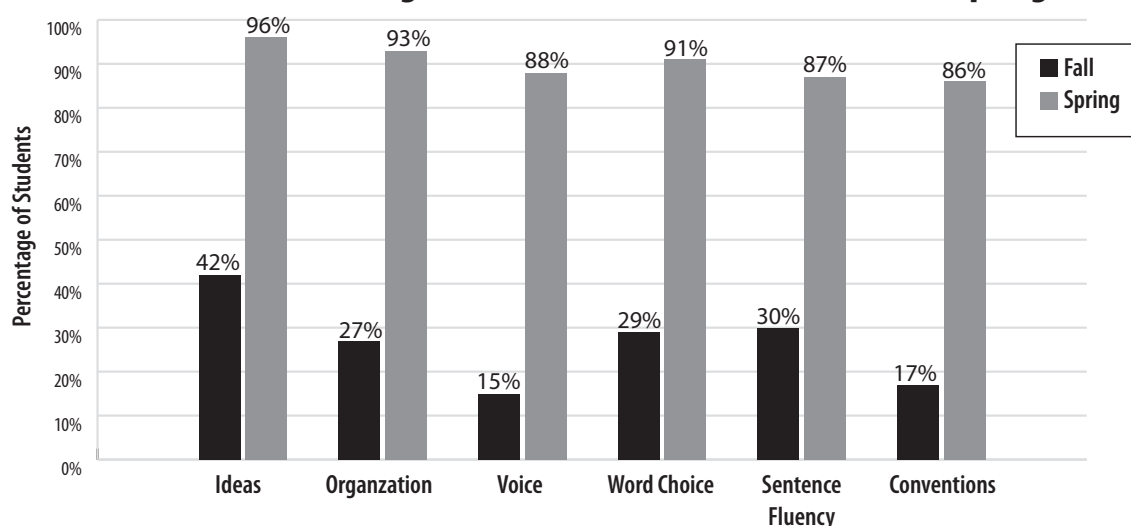
6. Additional small-scale studies highlighting the effectiveness of the Traits Model are also available. Most of these studies examined the use of the traits in one school district, one grade, or one classroom. All the studies show increases in student writing performance (Jarmer et al., 2000; Kent School District in Washington, Pilot SAS Writing Assessment, Hartly Elementary School).

Note the promising test results for six traits in the data from Blue Springs District just outside Kansas City, MO. Approximately 950 kindergarten through second grade students from 13 Blue Springs elementary schools were tested in the fall and again in the spring on their understanding of the six traits: ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, voice, and conventions. On all six traits, as Deputy Superintendent Annette Seago effused, the K–2 students made "phenomenal growth" (2011). The proof is in the numbers. In the fall, for example, when the test was first administered, only 14 second graders demonstrated an outstanding grasp of *ideas*; by spring that number had shot up to 262 students. In a similar manner, in the fall, 10 second graders scored outstanding on *organization*; 17 on *conventions*. In the spring, after immersion in the six traits, those numbers shifted dramatically up: 229 and 222 students respectively. Overall, after a year-long intensive six traits program, the district's primary students demonstrated significant writing growth across the six traits, shifting from, for example, just 27% of first graders on grade level or above in the fall versus 93% in the spring.
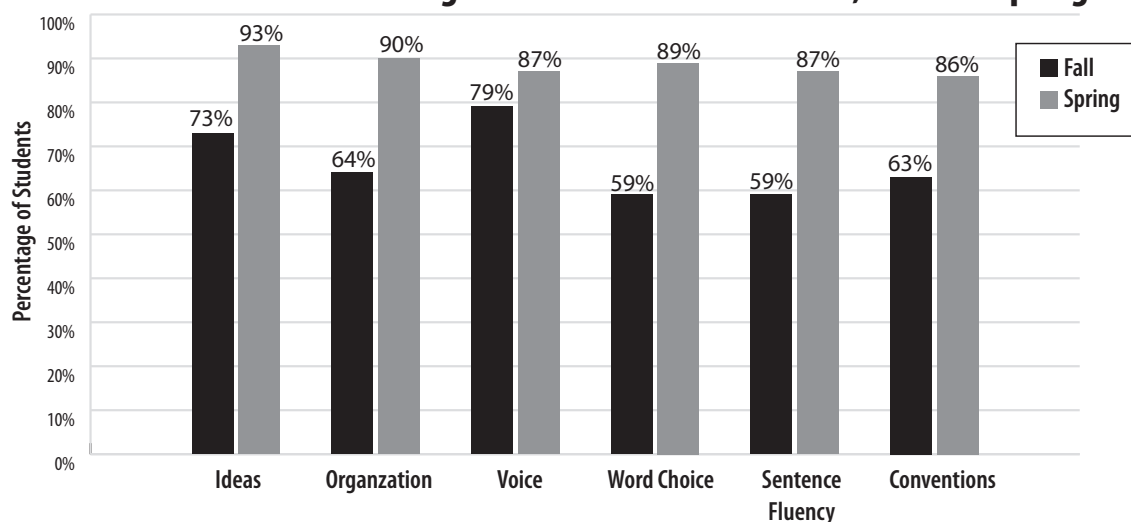
Kindergarten: Percentage at Grade Level and Above, Fall and Spring

First Grade: Percentage at Grade Level and Above, Fall and Spring

Percentage of Students

Trait	Fall	Spring
Ideas	42%	96%
Organzation	27%	93%
Voice	15%	88%
Word Choice	29%	91%
Sentence Fluency	30%	87%
Conventions	17%	86%

Second Grade: Percentage at Grade Level and Above, Fall and Spring

Percentage of Students

Trait	Fall	Spring
Ideas	73%	93%
Organzation	64%	90%
Voice	79%	87%
Word Choice	59%	89%
Sentence Fluency	59%	87%
Conventions	63%	86%

"Grade level and above" refers to those students who scored a 3, 4, or 5 on the Primary Traits Scoring Guide (Culham, 2005).

Given the paramount importance of the traits of writing, it shouldn't surprise us that the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment Framework will test students on three broad domains—1) Development of Ideas, 2) Organization of Ideas, 3) Language Facility and Conventions—and the essential features within each domain, which coincide precisely with the traits of writing and their key qualities, as developed by writing expert Ruth Culham (Scholastic, 2011).

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2011 NAEP Writing Criteria for Evaluating Student Responses

Traits Writing: Chart of Traits and Qualities

Development of ideas is effective in relation to the writer's purpose and audience.

- Depth and complexity
- Approaches to thinking and writing
- Details and examples

Ideas

Finding a Topic
Developing the Topic
Focusing the Topic
Using Details

Organization is logical in relation to the writer's purpose and audience.

- Text structure
- Coherence
- Focus

Organization

Creating the Lead
Using Sequence Words and Transition Words
Structuring the Body
Ending With a Sense of Resolution

Language facility and conventions support clarity of expression and the effectiveness of the writing in relation to the writer's purpose and audience.

- Sentence structure and sentence variety
- Word choice
- Voice and tone
- Grammar, usage, and mechanics (capitalization, punctuation, and spelling)

Voice

Establishing a Tone   Creating a Connection to the Audience
Conveying the Purpose   Taking Risks to Create Voice

Word Choice

Applying Strong Verbs   Using Specific and Accurate Words
Selecting   Choosing Words That Deepen
Striking Words   Meaning and Phrases

Sentence Fluency

Crafting Well-Build Sentences   Capturing Smooth and Rhythmic Flow
Varying Sentence Types   Breaking the "Rules" to Create Fluency

Conventions

Checking Spelling   Capitalizing Correctly
Punctuating Effectively   Applying Grammar and Usage

2011 NAEP Writing Criteria for Evaluating Student Responses

Development of ideas is effective in relation to the writer's purpose and audience.
  • Depth and complexity
  • Approaches to thinking and writing
  • Details and examples

Organization is logical in relation to the writer's purpose and audience.
  • Text structure
  • Coherence
  • Focus

Language facility and conventions support clarity of expression and the effectiveness of the writing in relation to the writer's purpose and audience.
  • Sentence structure and sentence variety
  • Word choice
  • Voice and tone
  • Grammar, usage, and mechanics (capitalization, punctuation, and spelling)

What About the Common Core State Standards?

Traits Writing is meticulously aligned to writing standards—both specific state writing standards as well as those included in the Common Core State Standards. The CCSS are divided into four categories, all taught in Traits Writing:

1. **Text Types and Purposes**
   Center on the modes of writing—expository, narrative, and persuasive; at least two units each year in the traits program explore and practice each mode.

2. **Production and Distribution of Writing**
   Feature revising (traits: ideas, organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency), editing (trait: conventions) and publication of work using technology (trait: presentation). All seven traits are covered within these standards.

3. **Research to Build and Present Knowledge**
   Promote learning to write; throughout the traits program, students write to demonstrate learning (using information collected from multiple sources) and to express opinions and ideas about texts read (using supporting textual evidence).

4. **Range of Writing**
   Require short- and long-term writing projects. Each week in Traits Writing, students write smaller pieces as well as work on their mode-specific unit project.

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The Value of an Analytic Stance

Analytic assessment is individualized, focused, and precise because it requires us to look at writing from multiple perspectives. Like scorers of holistic assessment, those who engage in analytic assessment use a rubric or scoring guide. But they use the rubrics and scoring guides to determine multiple scores for a piece of writing, rather than just one. In Trait Writing, both teacher and student consider 28 different information points (seven traits times four key qualities) as they work to assess papers using the six-point scoring guide for each trait:

The Six Point Scoring Guide*

1. **Rudimentary:** The piece does not contain the core features of any of the key qualities for this trait. The writer may wish to start over or abandon the piece completely.

2. **Emerging:** The piece hints at what the writer might do with the trait. Extensive revision and editing are required.

3. **Developing:** The piece has slightly more weaknesses than strengths in this trait. Some revision and editing is needed throughout.

4. **Refining:** The piece has more strengths than weaknesses in the trait. A moderate amount of revision and editing is needed. Papers that score a 4 are often considered "proficient," which means they meet most state and local standards.

5. **Strong:** The piece is strong. It stands on its own. It may need a bit of revision or editing, but nothing the writer can't handle on his or her own.

6. **Exceptional:** The piece exceeds expectations in this trait. It really works well. There is no need for revision or editing unless the writer wants to push further into new territory.

 * for Grades 3–8; performance levels for Grades K–2 are Exceptional, Established, Extending, Expanding, Exploring, and Emergent.

It is the multi-faceted network of assessment points that makes analytical assessment an invaluable tool for learning for both teacher and student. In the process of working to assign scores for each trait, students and teachers simultaneously learn the "language of writing," the components of effective writing, and what's needed to draw together and orchestrate all the moving parts—everything from a rich knowledge of the topic, to the corresponding vocabulary that describes the topic, to the mastery of the conventions such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation needed to describe and present the topic. Again, it takes the guesswork out of both teaching and learning. Teachers and students use the same language to draw from the same set of understandings.

Research Wrap on What Writing Does for Us

As educators, we sometimes distinguish between learning to write and writing to learn. In some common-sense way, the two seem different. As our students are learning to write, they are concentrating hard on learning how to make wise choices—even a brand new writer is faced with countless decisions about how to use nearly every aspect of written language, both global (meaning and structure) and particular (language conventions). Writing to learn, on the other hand, provides an opportunity for students to use writing as a tool: 1) to dig their way into the meaning of a text, strengthening and deepening comprehension (Harvey & Daniels, 2010; Tatum, 2010); or 2) to learn subject matter (Lane, 2008; Gallagher & Lee, 2008). In fact, learning to write and writing to learn are interdependent. The ability to write well is essential for all aspects of our lives—in school and out. And increasingly, it's even tied up in the economic health of the country, prompting this statement from the NAEP Writing Framework:

> *Americans in the 21st century need to … communicate in a variety of forms and mediums, create texts under the constraints of time, and play a productive role in an economy that increasingly values knowledge and information. The pace of written communication in today's environment— the velocity of writing—reflects the transition to an information-based economy built on speed, efficiency, and complexity"* (NAEP, 2011, p. 1).

Into the Future: What's Needed to Foster Literacy and Lifelong Learning

We believe that literacy—the ability to read, write, and understand—is the birthright of every child in the world as well as the pathway to succeed in school and to realize a complete life.

~ Dick Robinson, Scholastic CEO

The Big Ideas About Fostering Literacy and Lifelong Literacy

- The family is the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the child's development (Urie Bonfenbrenner, Harvard Family Project).

- Teacher expertise is the most important factor in improving students' learning (Brenner & Heibert, 2011; Lent, 2007; Fullan, et al., 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2010; and Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999).

- The Program in International Student Assessment (PISA) defines *literacy* across disciplines as students' ability to apply what they know to new life challenges (2010).

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Family and Community Engagement

The family seems to be the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the child's development. Without family involvement, intervention is likely to be unsuccessful, and what few effects are achieved are likely to disappear once the intervention is discontinued

~ Urie Bronfenbrenner, Harvard Family Research Project

A quick online visit to the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) reveals multiple facts and statistics about the pivotal role of the family in raising healthy children. Innumerable studies show that family, home, and community are the "true drivers of a child's education." Here are a few key findings:

- Children's reading scores improve dramatically when their parents are involved in helping them learn to read.

- The family literacy approach harnesses the strength of parent-child bonds to help those who are most at risk of failing economically, emotionally, and socially. We build success by strengthening [the family's] confidence, increasing their ability, and broadening their outlook. The results have an impact on a personal level as well as a national one.

- Family literacy ensures the cycle of learning and progress passes from generation to generation.

Family literacy, in a word, works. And the benefits are immeasurable; literacy is one of the best predictors of a stable, successful life. The more comfortable a mother is with reading, the less likely her children are to suffer the effects of poverty, endure a serious illness, drop out of school, fall prey to violence, or face incarceration. Indeed, "reading fluency is a more powerful variable than education for examining the association between socioeconomic status and health" (Baker, Wolf, Thompson, Gazmararian, & Huang, 2007).

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The Support All Students Need

Early childhood is a time of explosive learning. While we know that learning is a lifelong endeavor, we also know that the brain is especially receptive to learning during the first five years of life when it is akin to a "super sponge," easily absorbing new information and dramatically expanding. It is for this reason that expert early childhood instruction at school and involved parents at home make a critical difference. Still, what's needed for our young children—literate, nourishing, and encouraging home and school environments—is equally important for our adolescent students. A robust literate life and involved parents, ideally within the context of a supportive community (Tough, 2009), is a student's best hope for high school graduation.

Consider the report "Raising Their Voices: Engaging Students, Teachers, and Parents to Help End the High School Dropout Epidemic" (2010). The authors detail the kind of effective collaboration that's needed between home and school to assure students graduate. Students admit that they thrive when both their teachers and parents work together to establish high expectations for student success. Parents and teachers understand that they must form a cohesive bond of support to assure their students graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary education and training and active citizenship. In sum, teachers must reach out to parents, provide multiple channels of communication, and parents must get involved in their students' academic lives, monitor their coursework and homework, and check-in routinely with their students' teachers.

And finally, parents who are readers themselves, who visit the library and bookstore, fill their homes with books, magazines, newspapers, and, even more importantly, discuss what they are reading with their children, are almost guaranteed children who follow in their footsteps. A literate culture at home nearly always results in children who recognize the importance of reading and begin to build their own literate lives.

For the majority of young people, enthusiastic and habitual reading is the single most predictive personal habit [leading to] desirable life outcomes. Enthusiastic and habitual reading is primarily a function of the family environment and culture, and it is most effectively inculcated in the earliest years (0–6), but can be accomplished at any age. Creating a reading culture can be achieved through a series of specific behaviors and activities undertaken by parents. It is not resource intensive but does require time, persistence, and consistency (Bayless, 2010, p. 2).

When we imagine people without books, we think of villagers in places like Afghanistan. But many families in the United States have no children's books at home. In some of the poorest areas of the country, it's hard to find books for sale. A study of low-income neighborhoods in Philadelphia, for example, found a ratio of one book for sale for every 300 children. Tens of millions of poor Americans can't afford to buy books at all (Bornstein, 2011).

What the Research Shows: Why Books and Reading Matter So Much

From a new study recently published in *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* comes the astonishing information that just the mere presence of books profoundly impacts a

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child's academic achievement. Conducted over 20 years, the study by Evans, Kelley, Sikorac, and Treimand (2010) surveyed more than 70,000 people across 27 countries and found the following:

- Children raised in homes with more than 500 books spent three years longer in school than children whose parents had only a few books. According to the abstract, growing up in a household with 500 or more books is "as great an advantage as having university-educated rather than unschooled parents, and twice the advantage of having a professional rather than an unskilled father" (p. 171).

- The results suggest that children whose parents have lots of books are nearly 20% more likely to finish college. As a predictor of college graduation, books in the home trump even the education of the parents.

And lest you think that only the privileged with the means to purchase books reap the benefit of books—not so. Even a child who hails from a home with 25 books will, on average, complete two more years of school than would a child from a home without any books at all. Research from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS; Mullis & Martin, 2007) reports much of the same. Surveying 215,000 students across 40 countries, PIRLS 2006 was one of the largest international assessments of reading literacy ever undertaken. And results from this study, too, show a similar impact of books in the home.

> As we read aloud to our young children, they learn about the world and acquire knowledge about particular topics— a knowledge base that contributes to the development of their reading comprehension over time (Duke & Carlisle, 2011).

PIRLS 2006 reinforces on a worldwide basis the well-established finding that children from homes fostering literacy become better readers. Students had higher reading achievement when they were from homes where their parents enjoyed reading and read frequently, books were in abundance, and students were engaged in literacy activities— from alphabet blocks to word games—from an early age (Mullis & Martin, p. 2).

Books matter so much, in fact, that even a summer away from them has a detrimental impact on achievement. As reported in *USA Today* (Toppo, 2010), by sixth grade, the so-called summer slide may account for 80% of the achievement gap. Eminent literacy researcher Richard Allington explained: "You do that across nine or ten summers, and the next thing you know, you've got almost three years' reading growth lost".

Happily, Allington and cohorts (Toppo, 2010) may have also discovered the secret to preventing the summer slide simply by distributing books to kids. For the last three years, in 17 high-poverty elementary schools in Florida, Allington and colleagues selected more than 850 students to whom, on the last day of the school year, they gave 12 free books, choosing the books from a list the students provided. Three years later, the results are heartening: "Those students who received books had significantly higher reading scores, experienced less of a summer slide and read more on their own each summer than the 478 who didn't get books" (Toppo). Clearly, there is something about owning your own books that seems to

make a critical difference. As Rebecca Constantino of the University of California at Irvine and the founder of Access Books, a program that has given away more than one million books, remarked, "It's very powerful when you go to a kid's home and ask him, 'Where's your library?'" (Toppo).

Reading Is Fundamental

Similar results are evident in an unprecedented search uncovering 11,000 reports and analyzing 108 of the most relevant studies. Children's book lending and ownership programs were shown to have positive behavioral, educational, and psychological outcomes. The study Children's Access to Print Materials and Education-Related Outcomes (2010) was commissioned by Reading Is Fundamental, the largest children's literacy nonprofit in the United States, and the findings show that providing children access to print materials accomplishes the following:

- Improves reading performance. Among the studies reviewed, kindergarten students showed the biggest increase.

- Is instrumental in helping children learn the basics of reading, such as letter and word identification, phonemic awareness, and completion of sentences.

- Prompts them to read more frequently and for greater amounts of time.

- Improves their attitudes toward reading and learning.

"The findings reveal what so many have both suspected and innately known to be true—access to print materials does, in fact, improve children's reading skills, among other critical educational factors" (2010). This research is conclusive evidence for educators, parents, and communities to better understand the significance of making print material available for children at school and in the home.

Research Wrap on Family and Community Engagement

Reading at school is critical, but reading outside of school is equally essential for fostering academic success as evident in a massive 1992 study by W.B. Elley, who investigated the reading achievement of over 200,000 children in 32 countries. He found the time children spend reading is related to their achievement levels in reading. What's more, he demonstrated that the amount of voluntary out-of-school book reading that students report is positively related to their achievement levels in reading.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a large, federally funded research study that investigated the out-of-school reading habits of fourth-grade children in 42 U.S. states, found similar results; in sum:

Students who read for fun almost every day outside of school scored higher on the NAEP assessment of reading achievement than children who read for fun only once or twice a week, who in turn outscored children who read for fun outside of school only once or twice a month, who in turn, outscored children who hardly ever or never read for fun outside of school (Mullis, et al, 1993, p. 38).

Finally, given the multifaceted nature of reading comprehension and achievement (Duke & Carlisle, 2010), it's not surprising to find that multiple factors in the home also predict literacy success at school (Snow, Barnes, et al, 1991). These factors include the following:

- literacy practices at home such as access to books, the read-aloud, and a chance to talk about books
- educational expectations of the child
- family income
- number of outings kids have each week to museums, libraries, and the like
- television viewing (restricting TV correlates positively with reading achievement)

The good news is that even if the home environment is limited, a thoughtful, responsive teacher can make up the difference through exemplary literacy practices at school (Snow, Porche, Tabors, and Harris, 2007).

Professional Development

The most direct way to fuel student progress is to continue to
invest in building the skills and knowledge of our nation's K–12 teachers.

~ Pam Grossman, *Investing in Teacher Professional Development*

We have long known that it's the quality of the teaching in our classrooms that makes the difference for all students. Indeed, students with access to outstanding teachers often make more than a year's growth academically. And now comes the remarkable news from Harvard economist Raj Chetty (2010) that when five-year-olds experience quality teaching in their kindergarten classroom, it may predict their financial success later in life. In other words, an early start with a superb, professionally informed teacher is a tremendous advantage.

What the Research Shows About Professional Development

What seems simple commonsense—that is, the teacher steeped in professional theory and practice is a more effective teacher—is now backed by convincing research.

- "Principles of Adolescent Literacy Reform," a NCTE Research Report Brief states, "A growing body of research documents the connection between systematic and sustained professional development and improved student achievement" (2006, p. 11).

- This dramatic statement from The Institute of Education Sciences (2007) also makes clear the connection: "...teachers who receive substantial professional development— an average of 49 hours—can boost their students' achievement by approximately 21 percentile points" (Yoon et al. 2007, p. i).

- Multiple reports—from Joyce and Showers in *Student Achievement Through Staff Development* (2002), Michael Fullan in *Breakthrough* (Fullan, Hill, and Crévola, 2006), and The Alliance for Excellent Education—show "unequivocal research results: high quality

professional development with embedded support positively affects student learning and improves standardized test scores" (Lent, 2007, p. ix).

- Peter Johnston (2011) notes that teacher knowledge trumps instructional programs: "There is abundant research indicating that student outcomes in the general population are more closely tied to the quality of teaching than to characteristics of the instructional program adopted (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Haycock, 2003; Taylor & Person, 2002; Tivnan & Hemphill, 2005).

In *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future,* Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) reviews South Korea, Finland, and Singapore's astonishing rise to the top of student achievement scales. How did they do it? As Darling-Hammond explains, a key unifying component among the three countries is their emphasis on exemplary professional development.

> Good teachers form the foundation of good schools, and improving teachers' skills and knowledge is one of the most important investments of time and money that local, state, and national leaders make in education (American Educational Research Association, 2005).

After their initial teacher preparation, new teachers are paired with expert teachers and receive side-by-side apprenticeship training with time to participate in coursework in classroom management, counseling, reflective practices, and assessment. Thereafter, the government pays for 100 hours of professional development each year for all teachers, in addition to the 20 hours a week they have to work with other teachers and visit one another's classrooms to study teaching. Currently, teachers are trained to undertake action research projects in the classroom so that they can examine teaching and learning problems, and find solutions that can be disseminated to others (p. 190).

As Darling-Hammond points out, although Finland, Korea, and Singapore differ significantly from one another culturally and historically, all three have made "startling improvements in their education systems over the last 30 years. Their investments have catapulted them from the bottom to the top of international rankings in student achievement and attainment, graduating more than 90% of their young people from high school and sending large majorities through college as well, far more than in the much wealthier United States" (p. 190).

While this particular expansive approach to professional development may be beyond the current reach of the United States, which is hugely complex and multi-faceted compared to the relative homogeneous nature of South Korea, Finland, and Singapore, there are elements and understandings already in place in the United States that we can use to build our own exemplary approach to professional support for teachers. And indeed, it seems that day has arrived. "Improving teacher effectiveness has risen to the top of national education priorities" (Devaney, 2010).

What the Research Shows
About Professional Development

As Robin Fogarty and Brian Pete (2009) point out, "Adult learners have preferences and predilections that make them different from other learners" (p. 32). They detail the "best practices" of professional development and present what they call the "Syllabus of Seven," which provides theoretically sound, productive, and satisfying professional development that guides teachers as they move from their own learning to helping their students learn. These seven protocols call for professional learning that is "sustained, job-embedded, collegial, interactive, integrative, practical, and results-oriented" (p. 32):

1. **Sustained professional learning**

   Teachers are more likely to get involved in professional efforts if they understand that it's long-term and here to stay. That means the best professional efforts reflect careful planning, occur regularly, and foster collaborative dialogue about student-centered concerns.

2. **Job-embedded professional learning**

   On-site coaches, lead teachers, and peer coaches are all part of a network of school-based support that makes a huge difference in professional development success. When teachers have access to immediate and consistent guidance and feedback, their willingness to take on new challenges increases immeasurably. As Fogarty and Pete note, "Coaching makes a difference" (p. 33).

3. **Collegial professional learning**

   Adult learners work best with colleagues (Knowles et al., 1998; Zemek and Zemke, 1981). No surprise then that professional learning communities (Dufour and Eaker, and Dufour, 2008) have been a successful model of school improvement; teachers feel more comfortable taking on new challenges when they can share their experiences with their peers. Whenever possible, all professional development efforts should be team-based.

4. **Interactive professional learning**

   Change happens when teachers own their own learning; interactive professional exploration in collaborative teams is a must.

5. **Integrative professional learning**

   Thirty-two teachers employ thirty-two learning styles, so it's best to provide the information in multiple formats: face-to-face, online, and in printed materials. What's more, it's also important to provide multiple methods for processing new learning, including book study groups, action research, data analysis, collaborative planning, reflective questions, demonstration teaching, peer dialogues, journaling, and conferencing.

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6. Practical professional learning

Adult learners are impatient with anything that doesn't promise immediate application. They want information that they can use Monday morning to make a difference in their own classrooms.

7. Results-oriented professional learning

Professional learning at its best is data-based (Marzano 2003). Teachers want evidence that the change the school is promoting will make a real difference for both them and their students. Sustaining and maintaining effective professional learning begins with measurable results.

Research Wrap on Professional Development

These days, everything is touted as "research-based." Consumers beware: assign a thoughtful team of teachers and administrators the job of carefully reviewing "the research" behind all programs and products and make sure the claims for student success are legitimate. Teachers might also consider implementing their own pilot studies; try an idea or program for a period of time and collect data. What's the evidence a new approach actually works?

Designs and Strategies

Powerful professional development combines learning strategies: look for coaching, study groups, teacher professional book clubs, action research, peer observation, data analysis in collaborative teams, social networking—all are avenues for professional learning.

A highly effective teacher (in the top 5% of all teachers) helps students learn, on average, the equivalent of a year-and-a-half of learning in a year (Hanushek, 2002).

Learning

Deep understanding is the goal best achieved through active learning processes that promote reflection such as discussion and dialogue, writing, demonstrations, practice with feedback, and group problem solving.

Collaboration Skills

There are multiple ways to build a collegial community; increasingly, social networking is aiding the process through available tools such as Nings and Google calendar. Indeed, nearly every day it seems new online collaboration tools arrive.

Content Equity

The goal of professional development, of course, is to set high expectations for all students and help all succeed.

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Quality Teaching

Isn't this what professional development is all about? But quality teaching is multi-faceted and includes multiple components including content knowledge, the use of research-based instructional strategies to address academic standards, and implementation of a range of classroom assessments. All are important; all need to be addressed.

Family Involvement

At its core, the most effective education fosters collaboration among the school, home, and community, organized around a set of mutually agreed-upon goals. For teachers who work to establish a partnership with their students' families, a key goal is understanding and respecting each family's unique culture and language and finding ways, even with a linguistic barrier, to communicate frequently and welcome their classroom participation.

Literacy for a New World

Traditional notions of literacy, based squarely on the printed word, are rapidly giving way to multiple ideas of what constitutes literate activity. It is now common to use the plural—literacies—to refer to a range of concepts, including visual, digital, and others.

~ Janet Richards & Michael McKenna, *Integrating Multiple Literacies in the Classroom*

What is meant by 21st century learning skills? For that definition, we turn to Bernie Trilling and Charles Fadel's (2009) definitive book on the matter, *21st Century Learning Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times*. They address the skills in three useful categories.

Learning and Innovation Skills
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Communication and collaboration
- Creativity and imagination

Digital Literacy Skills
- Information literacy
- Media literacy
- Information and communication technologies

Career and Life Skills
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Initiative and self-direction
- Social and cross-cultural interaction
- Productivity and accountability
- Leadership and responsibilities

The MILE Guide: Milestones for Improving Learning & Education (Box et al., 2009), assembled by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, the leading advocacy organization focused on infusing 21st century skills into education, outlines six new literacies our students will need for future success:
- civic literacy
- technology literacy
- global literacy
- economic literacy
- health literacy
- environmental literacy

Stanford University scholar Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) gets to the heart of the matter: "The new mission of schools is to prepare students to work at jobs that do not yet exist, creating ideas and solutions for products and problems that have not been identified, using technologies that have not yet been invented" (p. 2).

Trilling and Fadel's (2009) definition of 21st century learning skills—problem solving and critical thinking and all that's required to overcome challenges: collaboration, communication, innovation, flexibility and initiative—seems to encapsulate what's needed to live successfully in our increasingly complex world. In fact, the Program in International Student Assessment (PISA) defines literacy across disciplines as students' ability to apply what they know to new life challenges. Information is exploding exponentially. And *exploding* is the right descriptor. According to the International Data Corporation (IDC; Gantz, 2008), by 2011 the digital universe will be 10 times the size it was in 2006. Or, explained another way: Five exabytes of new knowledge (500,000 times the volume of the Library of Congress print collection) was generated in 2002, more than three times as much as in 1999. In three years, from 1999 to 2002, the amount of new information produced nearly equaled the amount produced in the entire history of the world. The amount of new technical information is doubling every 72 hours (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Given the astronomical number of facts the digital universe represents, helping our students learn how to use their minds, read critically, and get at the heart of what they need to address must become our instructional focus. The "anemic teaching" (Darling-Hammond, 2010) of the last two decades—rote memorization and low-level, test-driven thinking—must give way to robust learning and habits of mind.

These days, we are well aware that we—and especially the students we work to serve—are facing new challenges on an unprecedented scale. We need books and the access to the critical thinking they offer. As new "media literacies" such as wikis, blogs, and Nings burst onto the scene, knowing how to read critically and evaluate the worth of the text before you is more critical than ever. To that end, books and the provocative discussions they make possible provide essential training. Our aim? To help our students create a list of essential questions they bring to every "textual encounter," print-based or not. Elizabeth Thoman, founder of the Center for Media Literacy, suggests that inquiry is at the heart of helping students navigate new media, and offers a list of questions all students should keep in mind as they encounter new text:

1. Who created or paid for the message? (authorship, producer)
2. Why was it created? (purpose)
3. Who is the message designed to reach? (target audience)
4. How does the message get my attention; in what ways is it credible? (techniques, methods)

5. How might people different from me understand this message differently? (audiences negotiating meaning)

6. What values, lifestyles, and points of view are included or excluded, and why? Where can I get more information, different perspectives, or verify the information? (research, critical thinking)

7. What can I do with this information? (decision-making)(Jacobs, 2010, pp. 139–140).

David Conley (2007) added to the chorus of voices expressing concern about the habits of mind needed for a successful transition to college. Faced with exit exams and other high-stakes tests, high school students are spending way too much time memorizing decontextualized content and isolated facts rather than reading and writing extended text (as in books!) and developing the "key cognitive strategies" such as analysis, interpretation, precision and accuracy, problem solving, and reasoning required by the Common Core Standards and needed for college-level academic success.

> Only in books will children experience the people, ideas, events, and feelings that make existence comprehensible. Strong readers and struggling readers want to know the joys and sorrows of other lives, the common dreams that unite us, and the satisfactions of great stories. Teachers help by making reading as easy as possible for all of our students all of the time (Atwell, 2007, p.48).

Educating the Imagination

Children's literature expert Charlotte Huck (1979) defined *literature* as "the imaginative shaping of life and thought into the forms and structure of language. The province of literature is the human condition—life with all its feelings, thoughts, and insights" (p. 5). Literature educates both the mind and the spirit—and the finest literature offers the potential for transformative learning. Speaking in a commencement address to graduates of the Stanford School of Education, Elliot Eisner argued that "Imagination is the neglected stepchild of American education. Questions invite you in. They stimulate the production of possibilities. They give you a ride. And the best ones are those that tickle the intellect and resist resolution" (quoted in Carol Jago's 2010 NCTE Presidential Address, Orlando, Florida).

In his book *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need—and What We Can Do About It*, Tony Wagner (2008) outlined seven survival skills, which he described as the "new basic skills" for work, learning, and citizenship in the 21st century; note that curiosity and imagination (the realm of inquisitiveness and creativity) round out his list:

- Critical thinking and problem solving

- Collaboration across networks and leading by influence

- Agility and adaptability

- Initiative and entrepreneurialism

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- Effective oral and written communication

- Assessment and analysis of information

- Curiosity and imagination

The truth is, not one of these skills is beyond the reach of an avid reader. Indeed, these skills define the avid reader. If we consider such public intellectuals as Christopher Hitchens, Richard Rodriguez, John McWhorter, Calvin Trillin, Melissa Harris-Lacewell, and Diane Ravitch—they are all from wide-ranging backgrounds and yet they share one obvious propensity: they are voracious readers. As we encourage intensive, extensive reading (Harwayne, 2001), our students will not only thrive, they will triumph.

Students are reading and writing more than ever and sharing what they read and write through a vast network of social media. In the 21st century, *skilled, passionate, habitual, critical readers* (Atwell, 2007), aided by caring, professionally informed teachers, will read their way to academic success and, beyond school, into productive lives rich with the promise that reading makes possible.

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